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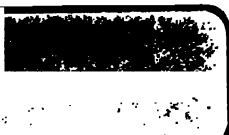
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BY

ANNA H. DRURY,

AUTHOR OF "MISREPRESENTATION," "THE STORY OF A SHOWER,"
"THE NORMANS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1875.

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CHAPTER I.

“AT last!” exclaimed Sylvia, as the train moved on from the last station before Westerton. There had been sundry delays on the line, and the light having faded early, she could neither amuse herself by looking out, nor by reading, and had grown restless accordingly. Adrian had been absorbed in his newspaper as long as he could see, and unusually abstracted afterwards, his head full either of politics or patients, of course; Nurse Winifred was asleep, and Dora too tired to do anything but wish she could follow her example; so Sylvia was left to her own resources. Chocolate drops, and *Punch*, and a charming railway

copy of "The Dove in the Eagle's Nest," had at first beguiled the time, but all failed at last, and her yawns and fidgeting became contagious. Dr. Mordaunt roused himself, struck his repeater, pulled Dolly's cloak closer across her chest, and looked out of the window.

"Three-quarters of an hour late. This is after your own heart, Sylvia, as you despise punctuality. It is to be hoped Miss Rivers is accustomed to railway slowness, or she will be giving us up."

Sylvia opined that if Miss Rivers were too particular about little things she would be odious, as most likely she was. A false front, and spectacles, and a large brooch with a staring likeness of somebody set in sham gold, and skinny hands, very knobby and red about the knuckles—these were essential details in the portrait her fancy painted, and such could only belong to the genus of the unbearables, against whom Sylvia's soul waged war. Next to the shipwreck, and the society, on which she had set her heart, it seemed one of her favourite visions to be perpetually annihilating this objectionable landlady; and the number of speeches composed beforehand, to be delivered

impromptu, would have made a little family Hansard of no small interest. The possibility of a frigid reception on account of being late was a happy suggestion, as it involved the necessity of preparing a speech on the spot; and Sylvia had just triumphantly turned the sarcastic period, "Madam, if you can control railway servants and regulate steam engines, you have the advantage over us of being always able to keep your appointments, supposing anybody to be desirous of seeing you, which seems improbable——" when the protracted whistle and slackening pace announced the close of the journey, and eloquence was superseded by bustle. A carriage was waiting, and so was Duncan, not at all pleased at the circumstance; but the sight of his white hair rather impressed Sylvia, as she had no idea, she said, that the ancient dame kept an old family retainer. Under his guidance, after the usual mixture of delay and hurry, which is one of the pleasures of a railway journey, the travellers proceeded to Granville House, where they were somewhat anxiously expected.

Every preparation had been carefully made,

and nothing omitted which Mrs. Delmar's experience could suggest for the comfort of the young invalid ; but when there was no more to do but to wait, Leonor had become aware of a depression of spirits, so unusual as to make her feel irritable all over. Afraid to let it appear, she took refuge in the garden, where her aunt was forbidden to come after sunset ; and on a raised seat, commanding a sea view, sat, wrapped in a thick shawl, listening to the muffled roar of the waves, and watching the first stars gleam out, though her thoughts were far away from either sound or sight. She was thinking of her lot in life, so strangely unlike her mother's, so unlike what her mother had hoped would be hers ; of her past five years of hard service ; of the new labours forced upon her, whether she would or not ; of the studies, the social pleasures, the consideration, which her compeers were allowed to enjoy, but which had been so long denied to herself ; compelled, not only to work for her bread, but to spend so much time in studying the whims and fancies of others.

Then she thought of her legacy and its conditions, which were a sorer topic than she

had ever chosen to allow. Instead of being grateful, she felt exceedingly rebellious and angry. Why had she not been trusted fully, instead of being made so ridiculous? Poor old Rufus (his nose was pushing itself into her hand at the moment), she needed no law to make her care for his comfort, but it was hard that it should be cared for at the expense of her liberty, perhaps of her health. It just amounted to this: that so long as the house was hers she might never get away from it—quite enough to make it a prison instead of a home. If it were not for her aunt, she almost thought she should have thrown up the whole thing. And being in this mood, she went on to torment herself a little more, and wonder what independence would be like. It must be such a luxury to feel free, to be able to travel, to go where you pleased, without neglecting duty, or giving offence; above all, to throw off the weight of little every-day cares and anxieties about money and living, and give the mind up to the grandeur of nature, the glories of art, the companionship of books; to see, to hear, to read all that was most beautiful in each, and feel brain and

spirit enlarging with their influence, instead of deteriorating day by day, as she was convinced was her own case. These people she was expecting; in what light would they consider her?—most probably as a more genteel Mrs. Biggs, weighing out civility at so much a smile, and watching for every opportunity of extracting a pennyworth of profit. Could she but have been free to receive friends as guests, without payment, how differently would she have prepared for their reception—how pleasant would have been the greeting; how delightful the exercise of hospitality; how light all the toil of preparation! Whereas now, do what she might, it was all a matter of business, and pounds, shillings, and pence; the guests would take every attention as their due, and perhaps think it dearly bought. And so she vexed her spirit, as the bravest among us will do at times, when the sea we have begun to walk upon looks rough, and the faith that gave us power is ready to fail. Perhaps she was a little over-tired. Strong and healthy as she had always been, she had not quite shaken off the fatigues of her long weary nursing; and it was not unnatural that she should feel a

craving for the sweets of liberty, and long to lay aside harness and curb. But as she sat and mused, rolling her shawl more tightly round her, she felt something warm and soft rub against her shoulder, and there was her other fellow-legatee, the pet cat, who never allowed her to be very long out of sight, without hunting her up, if possible; and something in the caresses of the poor animals went straight to her heart, as if they were reproaching her, in their loving fashion, with having thought it a hardship to be their guardian.

“Ah!” she thought aloud, as she petted them both; “I am as bad as King Robert of Sicily, who was never cured of his pride, till he was contented to be the companion of an ape. Here am I, grumbling because everything is not just as I should like, when, but for these creatures, I might have been obliged to leave my dear Aunt Mary, and go miles away to find work. Come, Rufus—come, pussy—we will turn over a new leaf, and be humble and good-tempered even to lodgers like Mrs. Caddis; and if we succeed in that, pussy, we may hope to get on to the ape in time.”

She had forgotten the hour while thus

absorbed, and it was not till she heard wheels on the gravel, as she returned to the house, that she remembered her guests were overdue. Her first impulse was to retreat, but second thoughts prevailed, and while Hannah opened the door, she remained standing in the hall, happily unconscious of the sarcastic speech which Sylvia had just completed for her annihilation.

Dr. Mordaunt was the first to alight; and almost lifting out his tired patient, he brought her in at once, leaving the others to take care of themselves. He almost started on finding himself received by a hostess so very unlike what they had all imagined; and his face lighted up with more than its usual brightness, as Miss Rivers came forward, all her previous doubts and fancies equally dispelled by the sight of the little drooping figure and wan face of her new lodger. A few courteous words passed on both sides, and then Leonor showed them into their sitting-room, and found herself making them welcome with as much ease and heartiness as if she had invited them to come. Dora, as she lay panting on the sofa, watched her from under her eyelashes, and Sylvia,



open-eyed and open-mouthed, stared with undisguised but delighted amazement.

"Why, Adrian!" she exclaimed, directly Miss Rivers had left them to give orders for their refreshment, "you never told us a word of this; you never said she was beautiful!"

"No, by the way, I never did," said he; "for, to tell you the truth, I did not know it myself."

"She is a perfect princess in disguise," said Sylvia; "and the cat and dog—did you see them in the hall? They look like her faithful attendants, who are enchanted until the spell is broken. What a delicious place this is! Oh! the smell of the sea and the wash of the waves, just what I have been dreaming about; and Princess Fairstar to wait upon us! Dolly, won't it be lovely?"

Dora smiled faintly—she was too tired for more, and felt that the loveliest thing in the world was Adrian's kind arm, on which her head was resting. It was agreed that she had better go to bed as soon as she had had her tea; and Nurse Winnie, who had been inspecting the bedrooms, returned to report that all looked as comfortable as could be, and that

Miss Rivers' aunt, Mrs. Delmar, was perfectly charming, evidently a lady to the tips of her fingers.

"And such fingers as they are, too ! I never saw such tiny hands on a grown woman ; and I seem to remember her face, somehow, and her manner of speaking, as if I had met her before."

"Ah !" said Dr. Mordaunt, "our friend Mr. Sibthorpe says she was celebrated in her day for the beauty of her hands and feet."

"Then she was a fashionable beauty ?" said Sylvia eagerly.

"I believe so. Her husband lost his fortune in a lawsuit, and some people say there was strong suspicion of foul play on the opposite side ; but it could not be proved, and the Delmars were ruined."

"And so they really are princesses in adversity, if not in disguise," said Sylvia, "and perhaps the adventure of their deliverance is reserved for us. I say, Adrian, I hope we shall be a great deal with them, and not stay poking in here by ourselves when you are gone. I want to know Miss Rivers, and play with the dog and cat."

“We will see about it, Sylvia,” said her brother, who had, in fact, been considering the matter already. He had hoped for the best, but not for such good fortune as this. If Miss Rivers proved to be in heart and in daily life what her face seemed to promise, he could ask nothing better for his young sisters than to be as much as possible in her company. He would not be in a hurry; it did not necessarily follow that, because she had bright eyes and a noble head, she must be bright and noble in everything. He knew human nature, he thought, too well to imagine that.

He forgot, in his pride of knowledge and security of wisdom, that there is one corner of human nature more difficult to know than any other, and that is one's own heart. Why he should dwell so much on the brightness of the eyes that might deceive, and the nobility of the head that might lead to disappointment, when he had only looked upon them for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, it did not occur to him to ask; but the fact remained, that the thoughtfulness and abstraction of the journey seemed suddenly to have rolled away, and a sense of contentment to have taken their

place, revealing itself in look and voice and gesture. He encouraged Sylvia's prattle, coaxed and cheered Dora, till she began to sit up of her own accord—and contrived to do more than half the work which Nurse Winifred had conscientiously laid out for herself, his authority as her physician silencing every remonstrance.

“The doctor just spoils me, my dears, and that is the truth,” she said to the sisters; “but he is master, and will be obeyed, and I am so accustomed to his way that it comes more natural than my own. However, when he goes back to London my lazy time will be over.”

The prospect of Adrian's going away and leaving them among strangers had all along been a dreary one to Dora ; and, tired as she was, this allusion to it might have been fatal to her equanimity, but for a diversion that soon after occurred. The door had by accident been left ajar, and Sylvia, as she went to close it, became aware of a tiny person in a black frock, with a gaily-dressed doll in her arms, standing so as to obtain a view of the party within. She opened the door wide, and then stepped back.

"As this is the land of enchantment, I suppose this is the fairy godmother. Pray, madam, walk in, and accept our humble homage. We are honest, though poor, never having found anybody yet whom we could take in ; and any trifles in the way of purses of gold, jars of jewels, bronze horses, and the like, will be thankfully received at once."

"Don't, Sylvia," said Adrian ; "you will puzzle and startle the poor child. What is it you want, my dear little woman ?"

"Would you like to see me dance ?" asked Lily, who had by this time made her way in, and stood eyeing them all with much curiosity.

"Like it ?" repeated Sylvia ; "we came here on purpose. Every station we stopped at we asked the guard which was the place where the fairy Cricketti-chirrup performed so delightfully. Will you begin at once ?"

"I never dance without music, but you may come down if you like, and Albert will play for me."

"And will he play for us ? You can't think how superbly we dance. We are giants, you know, not sprites and elves, and we do every-

thing three times as much as everybody else, because we are three times as big."

The child retreated nearer to the door, and looked half-frightened, though more curious than ever.

"Will you show me when you come down?" She was just beginning, when a voice in the passage called, "Lily! Lily!"

"The Fairy Queen wants your ladyship," said Sylvia; "you are going to ride with the court on white horses, with bells ringing at the bridles, and all sorts of fun going on, in the light of the moon."

"No, I am not. I am going down with Angélique to have her white frock fitted on. She is to have a new one for dancing. Do come down and see it."

"Lily!" repeated the voice, and this time Lily obeyed. They heard her little feet tripping along the passage, and descending the stairs—and then came a cry, and the sound of a fall. Adrian jumped up, and ran down in time to assist Miss Rivers, who, white with terror, was lifting the little girl from the floor. The child was crying, and trembling all over, but Leonor could not discover whether she

were really hurt ; and she was thankful when Dr. Mordaunt, by a gentle process peculiar to his profession, induced the little one to sit on his knee, and allow him to ascertain there was not much the matter. His announcement, however, that she seemed only to have been bruised and shaken, was little consolation to Lily. Her tears were flowing on Angélique's account—poor Angélique, who had been pitched against the balusters, and had broken an arm and a leg. Nothing would pacify her till the doctor picked up Angélique too, examined the fractures, and, pulling a case out of his pocket, proceeded to bandage the shattered limbs, prescribing for his wooden patient with a gravity that won Lily's heart, and suggesting remedies enough to furnish delightful entertainment for a week to come. Her grief assuaged, and her own misfortune forgotten, she took the doll lovingly in her arms, and carried it off, looking round as she went, to say, "Thank you, good big giant;" much to the surprise of Miss Rivers, who lingered to express her thanks in a more courteous form.

"You will be doing us a real kindness," he returned, "if you will allow my younger

sister to play with that child sometimes. They have made friends already ; and now that I am the doll's medical man, I should like to prescribe it a little society."

"I thought, when I saw how young your sisters were, that it would be dull for them to be much alone," said Leonor. "Will you bring them this evening to see us, and be introduced to my aunt? She is always popular with young people ; this poor little thing is devoted to her."

Dr. Mordaunt thanked her gratefully. He feared Dora was too tired, but for Sylvia he would accept the invitation with pleasure, and it would enable him, at the same time, to take note of Angélique's little mistress, and see if she were at all the worse for her fall. The child interested him, he owned, from its peculiar circumstances. This led, as a matter of course, to discussing the siege of Paris, and the situation of the armies, and the different opinions of the newspapers, till it seemed difficult to realize how brief their acquaintance had been.

Leonor renewed her invitation with increased warmth as they parted, and he accepted it as a greater favour than before.

CHAPTER II.

As soon as the tempting meal was over, Dora was dismissed to her pillow under Nurse Winnie's care, while Sylvia ran to the glass, sleeked down her plumes, which had an inconvenient habit of roughening on the smallest provocation, and announced herself as ready for any number of disguised princesses, or princes either. Now Adrian had begun by saving a child's life, they should get on; people always did in books.

"But, my dear, I saved nobody's life, as it happens. I only tied up a doll's leg."

"What does it matter whose leg it was? you are her heroic preserver from this day forth, and it is no use telling me the contrary. I am glad the sprite did not hurt herself much, and I shall like to play with her a little, though I object to children as a rule."

This was quite true, for Sylvia held to the theory that they took up a great deal too much attention, and made people hypocrites in spite of themselves. You had to pretend to wish for their company, and look delighted at their mischief, when it would be much more honest to say you would rather they went upstairs. However, when Lily, looking paler than usual, came forward to greet her, and held out her little bruised hand as a welcome, Sylvia made an exception in her favour, and gave her a kiss. So that when Mrs. Delmar asked if she were fond of children, she could answer graciously, "I don't mind them always;" and was quite ready to enter into the absorbing topic of Angélique's accident, and the course of remedies she was to follow. After discussing all these, and adding sundry original suggestions of her own, she turned to talk to Mrs. Delmar, who was busy over some of the delicate needlework in which she excelled—examined and admired her performance, but confessed it was far beyond her skill, or her ambition.

"I don't want to do things better than my neighbours, and that is the truth. I would

rather not know so much, and have more time to do as I like. People say you are never so happy as when you have loads to do ; now, I don't think so."

"What do you like best, then ?"

"I like to be amused, and not to feel obliged to do anything particular ; to get up when I want to lie in bed, or to go to bed when I would rather sit up. I like seeing plenty of variety, and buying what I want, and walking or driving when I am so inclined ; and when I come in, I like a good easy chair and a nice story ; it needn't always be funny—it is rather amusing to cry sometimes—only I like something delicious to eat while I am reading it. Now you know the worst."

"And is this the pleasant life you have been accustomed to ?"

"I should rather think not. Our poor grandmamma's maid, Stoker, was our mistress, and hated us as much as I do her. Dora thinks it wicked to hate anybody. I say it is worse to pretend you love them when you don't. Stoker always took it for granted, and made everybody believe that, whatever we said or did, we meant wrong—that was her idea of

charity; so if we wished for anything, we were not to have it on any account, and whatever we detested, that was to be our blessed lot. I leave you to imagine how sweet this was for one's temper; and as we were always treated as naughty children, the only wonder is that we are as good as we are."

"How good is that?" asked Mrs. Delmar, smiling.

"Well, Dolly is good all through, and under all circumstances. I can be a plague when the fit takes me; not that I feel inclined to plague either of you. It is very odd how unlike people are to what one fancies them beforehand."

"Had you formed a very alarming idea of us?"

"I don't know that I thought much about *you*, but I expected Miss Rivers to be quite different—not at all pretty, and rather sharp in her manners."

"Are you speaking of me?" asked Leonor, turning round at the mention of her name.

"No, dear," returned her aunt; "only of what Miss Rivers might have been had she been quite unlike what she is."

"Indeed," protested Sylvia, reddening with the sense of having made a blunder, "it was not only my mistake; we all thought, I don't know why, but somehow we expected—didn't we, Adrian?—quite another sort of person when we talked of coming here."

"Certainly," he replied; "we were not sanguine enough to hope for the good fortune that was in store for us. Miss Rivers will forgive us that; we shall know another time what we are coming to."

"Indeed," said Leonor, "you are very good to say so, and I hope you will be as comfortable as we shall try to make you; but it is our first experiment, and I am not at all sure of my part, beyond goodwill. If your sisters and that nice-looking nurse will only tell us what they wish, we will do our best to gratify them."

"Do you hear that, Sylvia?"

"Yes, I do, and I know one thing I want directly."

"I know it too," said Lily, gravely; "you want to see me dance. You came on purpose."

"So I did—I forgot that. Please to begin at once."

"I can't till Albert comes, and he is doing his lessons—no, here he is!"—as the boy came in, his hair in his eyes, his face flushed, and his hands all over ink, of which shirt-sleeves and collar had also imbibed a share. He took no notice of the visitors, but made his way to a corner where his violin was kept, and sitting down, began to take it out of its case. Leonor called him, but had to repeat her call several times before he obeyed it. The doctor was struck with the expression of his face—that unchildlike look which Leonor had observed before. He held out his hand, and when Albert, somewhat sullenly, gave him his, detained the hot fingers in his own.

"I am a friend of your cousin Mr. Sibthorpe," he said, kindly; "what shall I tell him from you?"

"That I wish he had never been born."

"Well, he has more than once wished that himself, being a great sufferer; but, you see, being born, he has to put up with it, and so must his relations."

"But he need not make me put up with a brute of a school, and lessons I can't understand, which they don't take the trouble to

explain, only lick you if you don't do them. I'll give them as good as they send, though, if they try that on me. I can't do the rubbish, and so I shall just tell them."

"You have not prepared your work for Monday, then?" said Leonor anxiously.

"No. A fellow can't do more than he can. I've bothered over it till my head is all in a roar; so, if they cane me, I shall just walk out of the school."

"Albert, *do* come!" cried Lily, who was standing in the middle of the room, stamping with impatience.

"Coming, *chérie*. I say—are you feeling my pulse? I don't want a doctor."

"But you have got one, you see; and the first thing he prescribes is, rest from Latin till Monday morning."

"Oh, come, I don't mind that."

"And the second prescription is, that you take that fiddle of yours, and scrape all the cobwebs out of your brain as fast as possible. Do you hear?"

"And the lessons?" asked Leonor.

"Leave the lessons to me. I have a plan for getting them done, which I will tell him

all in good time. To-night he is to play and dance with his sister, by order of the faculty."

The boy pushed his hair off his hot forehead, and looked the physician steadily in the face.

"Are you chaffing—or in earnest?"

"In earnest, my lad. You have done enough for to-night. Trust to me, and I will see if I cannot get you out of the wood on Monday morning. It is only at first these things seem so hard. You will think nothing of them as you go on, if you just have a lift now."

"Frank Longley said so, and he tried to help me, but his helping only made it worse. I say—you're not so bad for a doctor, by any means. Do you care for music?"

"I do, but to me she is only a holiday companion; *you* would serve her as a mistress, I know. Take heart; your Latin will be more help than hindrance, if you go at it with a will."

"I would rather write an opera than do anything else in the world. Will it help me to do that?"

"I dare say it may. Any difficulty you

get the better of helps you to face another ; and I believe writing an opera is no holiday task."

"No, indeed. Archer said it sometimes took a fellow three or four years."

"He did something in that way himself, that friend of yours, I think—if he were the same I met abroad, who was to have joined you in Paris."

"Oh, did you meet Archer ? Where is he now, do you know ?"

"He meant to try and get into Paris, on the chance of still finding you. I was sorry he did, for he interested me very much, and I wanted to bring him to England. I never saw a man," he continued, turning to Leonor, who was listening with evident attention, "with a neater, lighter touch. He was invaluable as a dresser, though only a volunteer ; his hands were as small and white as a lady's—not very strong, but wonderfully dexterous."

"The children seem to have been very fond of their friend," said Leonor, guardedly. "Albert, there is Lily standing very disconsolate, with her finger in her mouth, and she has been promised a dance. Perhaps Miss

Thornton will be good-natured enough to be her partner, if you ask her."

Albert walked up to Sylvia. "Will you dance?"

"With you? I shall be most happy."

"But I shan't, for I'm going to play. It is only to please Lily."

"Oh, that alters the case. But my dancing will not please Lily at all. Giants and elves never agree."

"Never mind for once," said Lily. "I will show you when you go wrong; you have only to look at me. Now, Albert."

It was so evident that dancing among the chairs and tables was an every-day affair, of which nobody took much heed, that Sylvia made no more objections, and set it all down as part of the general quaintness. The tones of Albert's fiddle were very beautiful, and she soon began to enjoy the fun for its own sake, unabashed by her partner's corrections.

"You don't dance well; you jump, and twist, and jerk," said Lily. "Why don't you move your feet as I do?"

"Because, as I told you, my feet are three times as big as yours, and do everything three

times as much. It is so with us giants ; we eat, and drink, and sleep, and walk, and sit still, three times as much as you sprites ; even our fiddles are three times the size of that dancing-master's kit of your brother's."

"What fiddle ?" interrupted Albert, pausing as he caught the word.

"*My* brother's, at home. It beats yours to fiddle-strings, as the saying is, and not an inappropriate one."

"I just wish he would bring it down and play with me."

"Well, I would rather he didn't, for he will be for playing with me too, and I shall have to practise the piano as a duty, and I hate duties. No, madam fairy, I am too warm to go on ; you must dance alone, if you will dance."

"I dance best alone," Lily said, seriously, and began one of her fanciful performances to her own supreme content. Dr. Mordaunt watched her with kindly interest, satisfied himself that it was doing her no harm, and went on conversing with Leonor on the subject of Albert's missing friend, the volunteer of the ambulance. It was a topic of peculiar

interest to Miss Rivers, now that Albert had gained a place in her affections, for she had strong doubts as to the training and influence to which the boy had been exposed, and wanted the opinion of an unbiassed observer.

"He gave me the impression," remarked the doctor, "of being a man of considerable natural ability, which had been allowed to run wild. His musical taste was excellent, and I have seldom travelled with a more agreeable companion. He knew a little of everything, and could turn those small fists of his to account in a dozen ways. I can quite imagine his appearing an universal genius in the eyes of a boy like that."

"And might not that fascination make him the more dangerous?"

"It might; but there was a strange humility in the way he spoke of the boy, as of something he was afraid of injuring. His faults, poor fellow, were those least likely to corrupt a child; opium and brandy are no temptations at that age."

"Ah, if those were his habits, there was small chance of his doing well."

"Small, but a chance there was. I think I

could have saved him," said Adrian, musingly, "if I could have had him well employed under my own eye. Paris may do something for him yet; the only time when a case like his would be safe."

"Kill or cure, you mean; a severe remedy."

"Better than kill or grow incurable, at any rate."

"Did he ever mention to you," said Mrs. Delmar, in a voice that faltered in spite of her utmost efforts, "any other friend or acquaintance of his—any young man of equal promise, equal versatile ability, whose music, as Albert tells us, he was in the habit of performing?"

Dr. Mordaunt considered, but could only recollect his mentioning the members of the quartette company—Mr. Caddis and his colleagues.

"I never heard him play. I believe he had sold his instrument to enable him to follow the army. But he may have had many friends whom he never mentioned. He was very shy of all topics connected with his early life. I think the only time he mentioned any circumstance of his childhood was with reference to a scar on his hand. I was surprised to find him

nervous about taking hold of a wounded horse, and he attributed it to his having received a bite, when a boy, from his Shetland pony."

The aunt and niece looked at each other—what a look that was! Adrian, watching them unheeded, saw that he had suddenly turned a page of life full of unknown interest; the two women, he could see, were quivering all over, and he knew he had only to wait, and they would question him again. It was Miss Rivers who first recovered her voice; the elder lady had sunk quietly back in her chair, with her fingers locked together on her lap.

"The matter concerns her most," thought the doctor, "for she cannot speak. Yes, and I see why—she has his eyes exactly. I was wondering where I had seen them before."

Without betraying his discovery, he did his best to answer Leonor's inquiries; politely accepting as genuine her futile attempt at careless curiosity. His description of the person he meant left much uncertainty; but when he was asked about his eyes, he paused a moment, and looked gravely but kindly in

Mrs. Delmar's pale face, which was turned towards him in silent, imploring agony.

"I did notice his eyes, particularly. They were remarkably fine ; their peculiar blue tint is rarely seen, and is always beautiful."

He rose as he said this to take leave, without appearing to notice that the eyes whose counterpart he had described were filling with burning tears, while the deep blush that overspread the widow's cheeks might have belonged to sixteen instead of sixty. She held his hand in her own when he wished her good-night, as if she longed to detain him, and yet the words seemed to die on her lips ; and before they had found utterance, Duncan was heard admitting Mrs. Caddis. That afflicted lady's voice, pitched to an unusual key of cheerfulness, preceded her along the passage and in at the door, as it might have done in a comedy.

"In the tea-room, Duncan ? How very nice ! Then I shall have the pleasure of shaking hands with my dear cousin's friends before I go to bed. Tell Hannah to light my candles, and send up some hot wine and water to my room directly, for I am afraid

of taking a chill. Ah!"—here she entered with beaming smiles, and hands outstretched in welcome—"here you all are, looking so happy and bright; and as Miss Rivers has stolen a march upon me, I must introduce myself to Dr. Mordaunt as Mr. Sibthorpe's cousin. I know you are a special friend of poor dear Philip's, and it is such a comfort to see any one who knows one's kith and kin. I have been positively counting the hours to your coming. And how is the precious invalid? Tired with her journey, of course. I long to see her, but I wouldn't disturb her for the world. She will soon get strong under our care. As for this sweet girl, she does not look as if she wanted much nursing. Well, Albert, you look a dreadful figure. I hope you have been hospitable to your dear Cousin Philip's friends, and told them how grateful you are, and how much you try to please him?"

"He wishes Cousin Philip had never been born," put in a small voice, unexpectedly.

"Dear me, *chérie*, how you startled me! Why are you not in bed?"

"Because I have been showing Miss Thornton how to dance. Angélique and me tumbled

downstairs ; and the doctor has tied up Angélique's arm and leg."

"My darling angel, were you hurt?"

"No, not much ; but Angélique will be ill a long time, and she is to have a white *peignoir* directly, trimmed with pink."

"Oh, I see ; an excuse for more spoiling. The fact is, Dr. Mordaunt, this little lady is getting dreadfully spoiled here ; good Mrs. Delmar, I suppose, does not know what little tyrants children can become, and right or wrong, she just gives her her way in everything."

"God forbid !" said Mrs. Delmar, sadly. The words seemed to have escaped her involuntarily, for she turned away and busied herself in folding up her work ; but the tone and the trembling of her hands were not lost on Adrian.

"I'll get at the rights of this before long," thought he.

He declined Mrs. Caddis's pressing invitation to sit down again, and telling Sylvia that Dora would be growing restless, took a courteous leave of the whole party, with a private remark to Leonor, that as Angélique's

doctor, he was equally at the service of Angélique's friends, should any of them require his advice.

She lifted her frank eyes to his face, and though she could make no answer, the gratitude of their look was quite enough.

CHAPTER III.

It was past noon before Dora was able to rise and dress, and she was full of concern at having kept Nurse Winifred from church, till comforted by hearing she had been with Miss Rivers to a beautiful service at eight o'clock. And coming back they had walked with Mrs. Longley and her two young ladies; and Winifred had been made very happy by finding that Mrs. Longley came from her own home; and they had talked over the dear place and the people, till it seemed like meeting an old friend.

"Our lot has fallen in pleasant places, my dear," she said as she assisted the invalid through the weary task of dressing; "the fear of God seems to be in this house now, whatever it used to be; and the air gives

one new life. We shall have you going to church with the briskest of us by-and-by."

"I don't feel much like it yet, nurse."

"No, my dear, you don't; but Mrs. Longley asked most kindly about you, and she and the young ladies are coming to call and cheer you up with a little pleasant society, and that is just what the doctor says will do you good, you know."

"I would rather have his than anybody else's," said the poor girl, feeling more disposed to cry than to be grateful. "Here is half Sunday gone, and I have not seen him yet. I wish I was going back with him to-morrow."

Nurse Winny knew better than to argue or remonstrate; and by the time Dora was on her sofa, and had been refreshed with one of her numerous meals, she had recovered sufficient equanimity to welcome Sylvia's return.

It was fortunate, for Sylvia was in a fit of rapture. Everything was first-rate. She should not mind going to church as often as people pleased, so long as the service was like that; all so bright and so cheerful, and such lovely flowers. The Longleys had a conservatory of their own, and kept all their finest blooms for

the altar vases. She had made *such* friends with the Longleys, and they were so nice, you couldn't think. And they meant to be perpetually together, and they would lend them books; and the eldest would like to know Dolly, and would "talk district" with her to her heart's content, and give her heaps to do; and Sylvia was to walk with them all over the country, and see everything that was to be seen.

"So it is all happening exactly as I said it would," said Sylvia, as she paused for breath.

"No, dear, as you said it wouldn't. You were to make speeches to Miss Rivers, beginning with 'Madam,' and ending in our being turned out of the house, remember."

"Nonsense, nonsense; but that puts me in mind: I had such a fright last night after you went to sleep."

"Did you drop your watch?"

"Worse than that; I lost the key."

"Well, you found it again, I suppose."

"Wait a minute. I have made a discovery, which is better than any shipwreck. The Longleys saw one some years ago, and it seemed to have been a stupid affair; a subscription at the town-hall, and the crew

packed off by the train. I have found out something much better,—there is a mystery in the house.”

“What sort of mystery?” asked Dora, incredulous, but amused.

“Well, if I could explain it, there would be none at all; but a mystery there is, take my word for it.”

“But what has it to do with your watch-key?”

“Just this, that I remembered I must have dropped it in the tea-room. I had been showing the children how the watch was wound up, and Lily took the key off the chain, and I forgot to put it on again. Well, and so I crept down quite quietly, that I might not disturb anybody, and opened the door very softly, and what do you think I saw?”

“Don’t, Sylvia!” for though the sun was beaming upon the wall, Sylvia’s voice had assumed the ghostly midnight inflections that always made Dora uncomfortable. “I *know* it was only moonlight, or somebody’s shawl, or a chair turned upside down!”

“Shawls, chairs, moonlight indeed! It was nothing of the sort. It was Miss Rivers

on her knees to her aunt, who was leaning back in her chair. I suppose they must have been having an awful quarrel, and Mrs. Delmar wouldn't make it up, but I couldn't see her face."

"Quarrel? Why should they quarrel?" asked Dora, to whom this seemed slightly inconsistent with the nurse's report.

"How should I know? But it may not have been a quarrel, only people don't go on their knees for nothing—and anyhow, Miss Rivers was begging hard for leave to do something, and I heard her distinctly say, 'And then, when the siege is over, I will go to Hastings myself, and bring him here.'"

"My dear Sylvia, I hope you ran away directly."

"I didn't. I stood stock still. To tell you the truth, I was frightened out of my wits, for I knew whatever I did I should make them jump, and as I always do when I am in a fright, I began to laugh. Miss Rivers was on her feet in a moment, and didn't she look vexed! I managed to say what I had come for, and she hardly spoke, only held the candle for me, and we soon found the key. I can

assure you I scuttled out of the room, and upstairs in no time, thankful to get away."

"I thought you had a dozen speeches ready for any emergency. Could not you find one to make a proper apology?"

"No; they were all gone as clean out of my head as if they had been the multiplication table or the kings of England. But don't you call this a charming mystery?"

"No; people often go to Hastings with no mystery at all."

"But they don't depend upon Paris being taken, unless somebody is there whom they want to see. There is a somebody, and he is in Paris, and when he gets out Miss Rivers will meet him at Hastings."

"But why should he go to Hastings instead of Dover or Folkestone?"

"Because William the Conqueror did, I suppose."

"Nonsense, Sylvia!"

"Very well, wait and see. My opinion is, that it will turn out to be a lover of Miss Rivers, whom Mrs. Delmar does not want her to marry, and that she means to leave the cat and dog and all of us to take care of ourselves,

and go off to meet him when the siege is over."

"Then pray keep your opinion to yourself. You ought not to have repeated a word that you heard in that way. I shall tell Miss Rivers exactly what you told me; not what you imagine, of course, but what you actually did overhear."

"Then please Dolly, dear, dear Dolly, wait till Adrian is gone, for if he were to be angry, I should break my heart. You won't break my heart, and on Sunday too," coaxed Sylvia, in such evident consternation, that her sister was fain to make the compromise, and defer the apology till the morrow. By that time, as Sylvia argued, she might have done something worse, and then the same speech would do for both.

As it happened, their uneasiness was uncalled for. Leonor had too much on her mind to remember the offence.

It had been agreed over night that they should all dine early together; indeed, the doctor had intimated his wish that his sisters could board with the family, and the matter was under consideration. All noticed how

ill Mrs. Delmar looked, and that she could hardly sit through the meals, and it was by a strenuous effort that Leonor preserved her composure and readiness in discharging the duties of her post. Mrs. Caddis, however, was fully alive to her own, and took great pains to make the young guests feel, that though, strictly speaking, they were under Leonor's roof, yet, as a matter of courtesy, they ought to be considered as under hers. She was peculiarly attentive to Dora, who thought her very kind, and very much to be pitied, and was quite ready to welcome her into their sitting-room, and to sympathise in the histories she poured forth of her past happiness and present wrongs. Being one of those people who think it does not signify who the listener may be, so long as somebody does listen, she went into all the story of her marriage, according to her own version, and related how Mr. Gawford had tried to win her pardon, and how he had had every reason to believe something had been done for her, which had not yet transpired. Time would show ; if anything happened to those two poor old pets of her dear aunt, a sealed paper was

to be opened, and she should be very much surprised if it were not in her favour. Meanwhile, here she was, a poor friendless, widow. No ; not quite friendless, while her kind cousin Philip lived, and such dear friends of his were so close at hand. She only hoped they felt for her as she did for them, as she loved them immensely already, and could almost imagine they had all been intimate for years.

The girls hardly knew how to respond to so much affection, nor how to explain that they had never seen Mr. Sibthorpe in their lives ; but they pitied Mrs. Caddis from their hearts, and believed all she said. And when she confessed, with penitent sadness, that abroad you grew careless, and did not think as you ought about church and Sundays, and her poor children had been allowed to do much as they liked, and were regular little Bohemians about serious things—Dolly's gentle nature yearned toward them all, and she timidly offered such teaching as she could give, and the loan of her most precious books—the solace of her own dreary hours in days gone by. The offer was gratefully accepted as a future blessing ; just at present poor Mrs. Caddis's mind was too

distracted for thought; a little later it would be only too delightful. It would be teaching enough she knew, just to be with so sweet a creature, and to hear her talk and though Dora, blushing painfully, begged her not to say so, she could not help liking her the better for having said it, and thinking how nice it was to be looked up to, and perhaps made useful.

In the meanwhile, Leonor, having seen her aunt lie down in her own room, with the hope of obtaining a little sleep, began to carry out a resolution she had been forming in the night, of confiding in her friend Mr. Longley. Under other circumstances she would have shrunk from disturbing him on Sunday, but her aunt's looks alarmed her so much, she had made up her mind to consult Dr. Mordaunt, and before so doing she wanted the lawyer's advice. He had told her where and when she might always find him, and she could only throw herself on his forbearing kindness.

Taking old Rufus with her, she set out for her friend's house, and within a few yards of his gate met him and his boys setting out for a favourite walk, to do the honours of the coast to Dr. Mordaunt. No apologies would

be listened to, but handing over the visitor to the care of Frank and Bobby, he gave his arm to Leonor, and conducted her into the house. At the earnest entreaties of the boys, Rufus was permitted to go with them ; he, like most dogs, loving woman, but always ready to transfer his obedience to man.

Mr. Longley took his guest into his study, and with fatherly kindness offered her his services.

"I am sure," he said, "that you have something on your mind of more consequence than the care of your household, or the whimsies of your lodgers ; and the more you feel disposed to put confidence in me, the better I may be able to help you."

"I know it," said Leonor, and she paused before inquiring if he were acquainted with any part of her aunt's history.

He replied that the Delmar estate case had attracted a good deal of attention at the time, and he remembered it pretty correctly, but he knew no more than the public and the press had known. He seemed on the point of asking a question in return, but checked himself as she began her explanation—

“I have my aunt’s permission to tell you a sad story, Mr. Longley; she has not the physical power at present of telling it herself. With you I know we are safe; but even to you it is so painful to touch upon, that I should not have had the courage to come here to-day but for something we have heard, which has given us a gleam of hope. You know that my uncle and aunt had a son, supposed to have been lost on board the *Nemesis*?”

“I remember hearing that they had.”

“Then I must go back a little, and explain how he came to be on board her at all. Hastings, being their only surviving child—two others died in infancy—had been brought up as heir to a good property, and was, I believe, a good deal indulged, as was natural under the circumstances. He was a boy of singular ability, versatile to a degree, loving music and the drama better than classics and mathematics; and with a passion for adventure and novelty that made him delight in all sorts of strange company. I need not tell you what that led to. He fell among thieves—that expresses it all—and the amount of debt he

contrived to incur without having anything to show for it, can only be accounted for by the fact that he had no idea either of the value of money or of its responsibilities, and was cheated and imposed upon without being in the least aware of the circumstance."

Mr. Longley nodded; the case was not rare in his experience.

"I will not detain you with more of his history than is necessary; he was always in scrapes, and yet always popular; they had to take him away from Eton, but he was a favourite there with many, as he was at his private tutor's, who could do nothing with him, except just when he chose, and who said that he might turn out a great man, if he only had to work for his bread.

"I am growing too diffuse; I must come to the point, terrible as it is . . ."

She steadied her voice by an effort, and went on—

"My uncle was a man of high integrity, but fond of schemes and experiments, and any speculation that involved the success of an invention was sure to find favour in his eyes. At the time the law-suit began, he was deeply

involved in some of these—I forget what—it matters little now. The claim set up to his estate was quite unexpected, and as you may remember, it all turned on a certain deed, by which it was secured to him and his heirs male; a deed which was not forthcoming. Its existence at one time was sworn to, but it could not be produced, and the judgment was given against my uncle in favour of his cousin, who holds the property now.

“When all hope was at an end, the first care of my poor uncle was for his honour;—how to arrange that everybody should be paid. He had a small fortune, independent of the estate, but the claims of his opponent were heavy, and his speculations had not had time to ripen, and he was sorely harassed and worried, hardly able to eat or sleep, always calculating and reckoning, over and over again, how to clear his name, and yet save something for Hastings. Poor, wretched Hastings, what does he do, but come and tell his father he *must* have a large sum of money immediately—several hundred pounds, I believe, for some betting transaction, in which, of course, he had been a heavy loser, in spite of promises of amendment

when such debts had been paid before. My uncle had money lying at his banker's, as Hastings, or his tempters, seemed to know. Aunt Mary has her own strong suspicion of one of them, who was much deeper in her husband's confidence than in hers; but it never could be proved."

Mr. Longley made a note in silence, and only bent his head to show he understood. He felt for her too much to interrupt her story.

"As he explained to Hastings, that money was set apart to meet coming liabilities, involving his own credit as a man of honour; it was not, he said, actually his own, it was part of a trust.

"Hastings did not believe a word of it, but went in despair to his mother, who had always had her own cheque-book, and was, as she still is, generous as the day. She could not give him what he asked, but promised to see what could be done, he vowing that it should be for the last time. Well, the end of it was, that when my uncle went to draw his money, he was shown a cheque of Aunt Mary's that had been cashed by Hastings the day before for the amount of his debt."

Mr. Longley's keen eyes had grown very intent and serious, but he made no comment.

"How my uncle controlled his feelings at the moment, I do not know. His first impression was that his wife had deceived and disobeyed him, and it cut him to the heart. He went home fearfully excited, and for the first and only time in his life—I do not think he quite knew what he was doing—treated her with harshness. It must have been a terrible scene, for she cannot recall it without trembling and agony. I hardly dare go on . . . you have, perhaps, guessed the truth."

"The cheque was a forgery," said Mr. Longley.

"It was."

Leonor's voice had sunk to a whisper. The pain of her recital was acute enough to fever her lips, so that she could scarcely proceed. Mr. Longley, however, made her drink some wine and water, and then encouraged her to complete her narration, which, now he had heard so far, it was necessary he should hear to the end.

"There was foul play, we can see, Miss Rivers, but it would require strong evidence

to convince me the young man himself was guilty. He may have been deceived, as his father was."

"Thank you for that word. My uncle's solicitor took a different view, and I was afraid you would. He was to blame, poor boy, fearfully to blame, but I have always hoped the son of such a mother could not have fallen so low, and that hope has kept her up, when she would have died of a broken heart. As it was, it killed his father; he was taken ill that night, and died before Hastings could arrive. When he came, his mother was hovering between life and death, and somebody—we do not know who it was, but Aunt Mary has her suspicions—told him that he was his father's murderer. You may imagine what would be the effect of such a charge on the temperament I have described, and in such a mental condition as he must have been at the time. He went away, we were told, as if the fire of heaven were pursuing him; and when Aunt Mary awoke to consciousness, she found a letter from him, of several days' date, bidding her farewell for ever. She did all that woman could do, and actually traced him on board the

Nemesis, bound for San Francisco, but too late to prevent his sailing ; and that ship, you may remember, was lost with all hands. It was long before she would give up hope that some might have been picked up ; and from time to time rumours have reached her that Hastings had been seen or heard of, giving her weeks of agonised hope, always ending in blank disappointment. I must add that, left as she was, widowed and childless, she gave up nearly all her fortune to clear her husband's honour, and has therefore had but little to spend in these searches after the lost son ;—of that little she was defrauded by the failure of the X—— bank, and it has been a hard struggle altogether. Never mind that, she has a roof over her at present, and it is not that which is troubling us now.

“When Mr. Gawford was here last he gave Aunt Mary to understand that circumstances which he declined to explain made him believe that Hastings was alive. She could not feel sure whether he was in earnest, or trifling with her for his own ends. If I had known as much of that gentleman as I do now, I should have cautioned Miss Sibthorpe against him the first

time he came, but I was nursing my own mother when all those misfortunes occurred, and my aunt has rarely mentioned his name; and now, sorely against my will, I am bound over to civility, for fear of his revenging himself upon her."

"Have you any reason to believe, then, that he spoke the truth?"

"I begin to think he did. You have heard Albert speak of his friend Archer? Unless we are greatly misled, I believe him to be the man."

"On what grounds?"

"On these:—a tune which Aunt Mary recognised as her boy's composition, taught by Archer to Albert;—a scar on his hand, which he told Dr. Mordaunt (who fell in with him in attendance on the wounded abroad) was the effect of a bite from his Shetland pony when he was a child—my aunt remembers the event as if it were yesterday;—the colour of his eyes; I find the children had already found out that likeness to Aunt Mary, and Dr. Mordaunt saw it at once. You know what eyes she has, and all agree that his are the same. His versatile talents, his taste for music, even his unfortunate habits, all point in the same



direction, and I cannot help feeling as near certainty as any one can on circumstantial evidence, whatever it may appear to you."

"Where is he then, do you suppose?"

"He meant to join the Caddises in Paris, so he may be there now. You see we are in this difficulty, supposing our belief to be verified, that any open attempt to communicate with him might only drive him farther away. As he could leave his mother for so many years, we can hardly expect him to return to her now. And yet, if he only knew how she has yearned over him all this time, he must repent and hate himself, as I sometimes could hate him! Oh, Mr. Longley! don't spoil your boys because they are clever; it was her one mistake, and she has paid for it so heavy a price!"

"I do not seem likely to be tempted that way," observed Mr. Longley, drily; "if Frank gets spoiled, it will not be for his genius, at any rate. You have something more to tell me, or to ask about,—what is it?"

"I want to know if it will be safe to confide in Dr. Mordaunt. His assistance would be invaluable, but he is a man to whom I could

never go with half a story, and this affair of the cheque is such dangerous ground. Were Hastings to return, and to be exposed to any shame or danger about it, his mother would be crushed at once."

"Is the cheque still in existence?"

"I do not know; I will ask her."

"Do so, as it is a matter of importance. In my opinion, we cannot do better than take the doctor into our counsels; his character stands very high, and he has, by your account, already found out half the secret for himself. If you prefer it, I will speak to him, and spare you the pain. If I were to look in after evening service, I dare say you would give me a cup of tea, and a corner for ten minutes talk with your lodger."

"It is trespassing grievously on your Sunday, Mr. Longley."

"Never mind that. We have good authority for doing it. The bowing down of a woman's body for eighteen years was nothing in comparison with such a load on a mother's heart; and if the one might be loosed, we may surely try to relieve the other."

So it was arranged, and without attracting

any particular observation, the two gentlemen had their conference, to their mutual satisfaction. Adrian Mordaunt was touched and gratified by the confidence reposed in him, and entered into the cause with all his natural energy.

"Now I know what is on the poor lady's mind I shall be able to prescribe for her body," he said, and was as good as his word. He sat nearly an hour in her room, talking of her son, relating such traits of Archer's character as had struck him most favourably, and listening in return to the details, which, after such long restraint, it was a relief to Mary Delmar to pour into a sympathising ear.

"I could walk blindfold and barefoot among the hot ploughshares, as they did in old times," she said, with a sad smile, "in behalf of his innocence with regard to that cheque. Heavy as his faults were, he was not guilty of such a crime; it was not in him. He had quite enough to answer for without that; but he will never come back to me unless it is cleared up. And there is one man on the watch, who, I believe, knows the truth, and would take care it was never known."

“You mean that Mr. Gawford, Mrs. Delmar. I will see if it cannot be got at in spite of him. Who was your husband’s legal adviser and man of business?”

“Mr. Pellet, of the firm of Pellet and Son, Chancery Lane. I do not know if he be still living—the elder Mr. Pellet, I mean. It is some time since I had any communication with him—indeed I never intended to renew it; he was so convinced of my poor son’s guilt, that I could not speak to him on the subject.”

Dr. Mordaunt looked very grave. “If this be the case, we must be careful what we are about. Your own conviction is as firm on the other side?”

“Before God!” she said, clasping her hands, and lifting her eyes to heaven. “I have prayed that the case might be sifted before the world, even if I had to stand, and give evidence. I would stake my life on the issue, if we only had fair play. Nothing short of his own confession could make me believe that he knew anything whatever of the forgery. He thought I had been persuaded, perhaps coerced, and he had the incredible weakness and folly to avail himself of such means; and his tempter reaped

the profits. It broke his father's heart ; mine has held out in the hope of one day redeeming his name."

"Even by walking among the hot plough-shares? Well, I believe myself that such courage and patience are never wasted. You must husband them well, remember, for we may have some time to wait, and our way out of the wood is not very clear."

"I can wait, Dr. Mordaunt, you have brought me new strength. I must not, and will not, wear out my niece's spirits by giving way any more. Help me, if you can, to help her who would give her life to help me. She will bear me witness that I do not often show this weakness ; but at this moment I can speak more calmly of my lost, unhappy Hastings, than of my noble Leonor."

The tears she had hitherto restrained would now have vent, and were more eloquent than her words. Adrian's manner assured her of his sympathy and interest ; indeed, the sight of her distress, and the story of her sorrows, had roused his chivalry to enthusiasm, as if she had still been the Mary Escott of Mr. Sibthorpe's reminiscences. When he saw

Leonor for a few minutes afterwards, he could not conceal the impression thus made, and spoke of her aunt in terms that brought a quick grateful flush into her face; it was the royal road to her heart, which Miss Sibthorpe had wilfully missed. And a thought of Miss Sibthorpe, appealing to the gratitude which could reach her no longer, arose at the same moment. If indeed her strange legacy had brought in an angel unawares, to help where all help had seemed hopeless, the past five years would have been well repaid, and she should learn to love her memory.

There was another of the party who found a good genius in the new lodger.

"Look here, you won't forget!" said Albert, when he wished him good-night. "I shall be in a jolly mess if you do."

"Come at five o'clock, if you like," was the answer.

However, his repeater had struck the half-past, and no student appeared, so Adrian went in search of him, and found him lying fast asleep across his bed, half dressed, with his books in his arms. At Dr. Mordaunt's touch on his wrist he woke up with a start.

"Papa, papa, I never told a lie about it—indeed, I never did!" cried he, sitting up with eyes half blinded by the candlelight. "Oh, I say, is it you?—Am I awfully late?"

"No; we shall have time, if we take it coolly. Get up at once, and come when you are ready."

And when the boy joined him, a quarter of an hour later, a small cup of coffee was smoking on the table, prepared in a wonderful little apparatus that travelled in Adrian's pocket.

"How jolly!" was Albert's only remark, but he drank the coffee, and his white face brightened up.

"I don't want to be an idiot, you know," was his honest avowal, as he opened his books. "One must do this sort of thing as the rest do; but I can't make sense of it, that's the bother."

"It would bother anybody. Let us try and get at the sense, and the rest will come in time."

And so clearly and patiently did he explain every difficulty, allowing the boy time to take it all in, and just giving him help enough to enable him to do it, that by the time the early breakfast was ready, which Miss Rivers had

risen to prepare, the hard lesson was mastered, and Albert had the real satisfaction of being sure of what he had learned.

“What I once understand, I can remember,” he said. “I shall do now. Oh, I say, mind you bring your violoncello next time, and I’ll show you something in return.”

“All right ; run down now and say I am coming, for I have not a minute to spare.”

And indeed he had left himself so little time, that he could only exchange a hurried greeting with Miss Rivers, lost his breakfast, and very nearly lost his train.

CHAPTER IV.

A PITEOUS summons from Mr. Sibthorpe was the first greeting the doctor received on reaching home, and to that gentleman's house he drove accordingly. A cab was waiting at the door, and Waters met Dr. Mordaunt with many apologies, and the announcement that his master's solicitor was with him just then—could the doctor wait five minutes? Not one, was the peremptory answer; he had come there first, at some inconvenience, in consequence of the urgent message, and if not admitted now, could not return before the evening. That his master could hold out till evening, Waters held to be out of the question; perhaps he had better step in, and ask if Mr. Pellet would take some luncheon while Mr. Sibthorpe received the doctor.

"Pellet? What of the firm of Pellet and Son? Are they your master's solicitors?"

"Yes, sir; this is the old gentleman. He don't often attend to business himself now, but my master is particular, and won't let young Mr. Pellet come near him, so the old gentleman, he always comes when anything is to be settled, and very cross he was too, when I went after him this morning, sir."

"And so shall I be, Waters, if you don't go in at once and let them know I am in a hurry. I can promise Mr. Pellet not to keep him waiting long."

Waters smiled his usual respectful smile, and was only absent a few moments on his errand, returning with a pressing invitation to the doctor to enter at once. On complying with this request, Adrian found his patient luxuriously enthroned in his new patent easy-chair, with all its mechanical contrivances for comfort; the table by his side strewn with documents and papers, over which presided Mr. Pellet, a red-faced, testy-looking elderly gentleman, whose crutch and gouty shoe might have pleaded some excuse for irritability. Waters was not far wrong; he was at that

moment in an exceedingly bad humour at having been forced to come out in the cold, when his son, who was hale and hearty, would have answered the purpose just as well. Mr. Sibthorpe, he argued, being an invalid himself, ought to have more consideration ; but then it was the peculiarity of Mr. Sibthorpe's ill-health, that it made him serenely indifferent to that of other people. All the suffering in the world was light as compared with his own, and therefore, if he wanted anybody to do anything for him, under all circumstances he ought to be delighted to come.

"Ah, Mordlaunt! I really did not expect to see you again," was his pathetic greeting to his medical adviser. "Do take a chair, and don't be in a hurry. Remember how the least thing makes my heart palpitate. Do you know my friend Mr. Pellet of Chancery Lane? He knows you by reputation well enough. I wish you would prescribe for his temper, for it is in an awful state this morning."

Adrian smiled good-humouredly, as he bowed to the old lawyer, and remarked that in such a case; as in many others, "the patient must minister unto himself."

“Hem!—Shakespeare,”—said the old gentleman, with a grim smile. “Well, sir, if you’ll undertake to cure our friend here of his fidgets, and prevent his bringing me out when I am dead lame, because he believes me idiot enough to have taken my son into partnership before he had learned his profession—I say, if you’ll undertake this, I’ll manage my own temper, more or less. And I’ll wait here till you’ve done it, for I’ll be shot if I take one step more than I’m compelled to do. You may say what you like—I shan’t listen to you ; I never listen to anybody unless I’m obliged.”

“There are the papers, Pellet, and an excellent map of Paris and its environs in last week’s *Illustrated*. I was studying it this morning,” said Mr. Sibthorpe, soothingly. “The accounts of the siege are very interesting, but one grows a little tired of it. My dear Mordaunt, you don’t know how dreadfully I have suffered since you left town. It is a very serious thing that you must absent yourself in this way.”

“My dear fellow, if London were in a state of siege, a poor doctor could scarcely be worse off than I should be if I might not keep an

eye on two little sisters—who, by the bye, have to thank you for helping them into such pleasant apartments. We shall have you running down there by-and-by, to see after your relations. You don't ask what I thought of them."

"No, I don't," said Mr. Sibthorpe, opening his box of lozenges.

"Then I will tell you unasked—your cousin has a couple of interesting children. I should like you to see them."

"I shouldn't. I dislike all children; interesting ones most of all. Of course they make pretty speeches, and repeat hymns, and talk about angels, and that sort of thing."

"Not exactly; the little girl is a born dancer, the boy has a passion for music, and I believe they learnt their first hymn yesterday."

"Very promising indeed; that fellow's mother was a dancer, so the family credit will be kept up."

"That boy will do you credit if he lives, but he has a delicate nervous organization, and school is an experiment that should be carefully watched. It will not do to let him worry his brain."

“My dear fellow, do boys ever worry their own brains half as much as they do other people’s? So long as he does not try mine, I really do not care much what he does with his own. Gawford must see about it when he goes down, and speak to his master, or take him a ride on a donkey for a change. Give a boy a beast to thump as he pleases, and he is sure to be all right. Only don’t propose his coming to see me, for I could not bear it—I could not, indeed. Feel how tremulous my hand is at this moment; I could hardly hold my pen just now, when it was necessary.”

The doctor took the offered hand with professional gravity, felt the pulse, and listened with his habitual patience to the long history of sufferings which had been undergone since he felt it last, and the almost piteous appeal against such enigmatical prescriptions as the “cushion,” which had worried Mr. Sibthorpe so much he could hardly sleep.

“I am sure I do as much as I can. I am altering my will now that I may leave something in charity; and Waters has been telling me a good deal about that what-ye-may-call-it society of Gawford’s, and how it

really finds out the sort of help that does most good in the end. He says a loan is often a greater service than a donation."

"Ay so?—and you have been lending some money through him?"

"Not that exactly; but Waters explained—he is a very sensible fellow, is Waters, and I can always depend upon him to see after things himself—he explained to me what I did not know before, that first-class subscribers to the society actually receive their money's worth back again, sometimes tenfold, the chances being the greater in proportion to the subscription. Most curious articles pass through their hands from time to time, old china, lace, bits of furniture, pictures, which are disposed of as prizes once or twice a year. The poor people are benefited, and one's money is not thrown away, which sounds reasonable, at any rate."

"Waters recommends you then to subscribe handsomely."

"I have subscribed already. I am to have no trouble about it, only I shall be curious to see what turns up. Actually one lucky person drew a genuine Ostade the other day, worth

any money. He sold it to a Russian duke directly."

"I conclude Waters hears all this from your civil friend, Mr. Gawford."

"He is very civil, poor Gawford. Useful, unassuming fellow, knows I hate to be bored, and that I cannot listen to long histories about nobody knows who; but Waters is clever at these things, and I can depend on Waters, you see."

Adrian did see, more clearly than was supposed, but his attention was that moment diverted by a grunt from Mr. Pellet, as he looked up from his newspaper.

"I say, doctor, is this your evidence at an inquest last week, on the body of John Field, formerly a lawyer's clerk?"

"The same, sir."

"And this Mr. Gawford, who gave evidence in the same case—is he the man you just mentioned?"

"Yes, sir. You may remember him formerly as private secretary to Mr. Delmar, of Delmar."

"I do remember him, certainly, though I have not seen him for a long time. Is it true, as is stated here, that the deceased

clerk left a box of papers, which are in your possession ?”

“Quite true. His widow made them over to me, that I might see if they contained anything of value. The poor fellow himself declared that Mr. Duke and I were to destroy them, but he left no written authority for us to do that.”

“He gave you no clue to their purport ?”

“None whatever.”

“And have you looked them over yet ?”

“No, I have not had time.”

Mr. Pellet pulled out his watch.

“At what hour do you medical gentlemen begin to get hungry ?”

“When we have time to think of it,” said Adrian, laughing.

“Can you spare nature half an hour at half-past two, for a basin of ox-tail soup at Zero’s ? Zero is famous for his ox-tail soup, and his wines are not bad. Will you meet me there at half-past two precisely ? I shall be glad to improve our acquaintance.”

“The invitation tempts me every way. I will meet you without fail, and to assist our mutual punctuality, I will take my leave.”

"To tell you the truth, I hoped I should hurry you, for if I sit here much longer, I shall begin to roar. This patient of yours will be the death of me, and I'll be hanged if he gets a shilling's worth of charity out of *my* will, let Waters and Mr. Secretary Gawford say what they please."

Adrian nodded significantly ; and being really in a hurry, was downstairs and at the hall door before Waters could spring out to attend him. Quickly as he passed that functionary's room, he had a distinct view of the two advocates of the Friend-in-Need, seated together in close investigation of a newspaper spread open before them. They looked up as the doctor shot past, and Waters flew after him, but arrived just too late.

"He's as lithe as a lamplighter," was the comment of the somewhat offended valet, as he returned to his confederate. "I call that downright vulgar in a physician, I do. I've seen them as would as soon have took a door off its hinges, as open it for themselves, and quite right too."

"Quite right, as you say, my dear friend ; but then this Dr. Mordaunt is only a conceited

upstart, and does not know how real gentlemen behave. For all he is here so often, I'll be bound he never considers that you have a right to some little percentage on his fees."

"Not he; though I won't say but what he was very kind when I was laid up a year ago. He sat up with me two nights, because there was no one he could trust to attend to me properly."

"Oh, that was to please your master, of course. I have no doubt he understands his profession. But look here, Waters, you must find out for me how that will is worded, and what he thinks of doing for the Caddises; and you must get me a commission to go down to Westerton some time in the week, when this doctor is safe in town—do you hear?—and I'll speak to the committee about your little matters. People who serve us are never left long in difficulty."

While this amicable arrangement was being made, the undignified physician was getting through as much work as a less active man would have accomplished in two days; and by the time the hour had arrived for his appointment, he had begun to recollect that, since his

hurried morsel in the early morning, he had not tasted food. Right glad was he, in his ravenous condition, to find his new acquaintance waiting, and the ox-tail soup already smoking on the board.

“I ordered a private room, as I wanted a word or two with you, doctor, and I have told them to bring in their best Sauterne; they are famous for it, only they won’t always give you the right seal. They know me pretty well, and I was ashamed to confess I shouldn’t be able to drink a drop myself, for fear I should break the waiter’s heart.”

The soup and the best Sauterne with the right seal justified all his encomiums, and Adrian played his part with both, to the mingled admiration and envy of his entertainer.

“Ah, my dear sir, if I had taken care of my health at your age, I should be more than your match now; but I played tricks with myself, and justice has caught me by the leg at last. I remember your father, sir; he attended me once, and gave me capital advice, all of which of course I neglected, as one always does. He was an able man, and said quaint things, as you know. I remember his saying on that

occasion, when I had argued with him that I could not keep to his rules, and quoted the text, 'If a man will not work, neither let him eat,' 'It is all very well, sir, but if a man won't eat, he will work to very little purpose, and end in not working at all.' So there is your own father's warning, which I recommend you to bear in mind."

"If every lesson were as well illustrated as this one of yours, sir, scholars would flock to you in crowds. Ox-tail soup and Sauterne are excellent arguments on a cold day."

"Then finish that bottle, and let me take immediate advantage of your conversion. I want to confide in you—not professionally, but as a gentleman."

"It is a singular coincidence, Mr. Pellet, that I had just been considering how I might do the same thing to you."

"Let me then break the ice first: you mentioned Mr. Delmar's name this morning—did you know him?"

"No; but I have just had the honour of making the acquaintance of his widow."

"You don't say so! Where is she?"

Adrian briefly explained. The old lawyer

took off his glasses, and rubbed them several times.

“I would give something to see her again—brave creature!—but she never forgave me for openly expressing my opinion of her son’s behaviour. I confess I was rather hard upon him, but I believed he deserved it at the time. She broke with me in consequence, and I have lost sight of her for years. You know her story?”

“Enough of it to enlist my good-will in her service. If you will allow me, I will tell you why I was admitted to her confidence, as I am sure it will be safe with you.”

He related what the reader knows already, respecting the unknown Archer, and the reasons they had for believing that he was the missing Hastings, and that he was now shut up in Paris. Mr. Pellet listened attentively, and made notes, as Mr. Longley had done, taking down that gentleman’s address among other details.

“Longley of Westerton is a very decent sort of man,” he said, patronisingly; “just the kind of friend those poor ladies should have at their elbows, instead of a cross old fellow like

myself, generally out of patience with women's stupidity before I've talked to them five minutes. Now you have told me your story, you must hear mine. I am morally certain that that wretched man Field, whom you attended so kindly, was a dishonest clerk of mine, who was dismissed for his bad conduct, and after whose disappearance it was found that some valuable deeds had disappeared, too—deeds kept in our iron boxes, to get at which must have required a good deal of cleverness. The most important of all was one belonging to Mr. Delmar, the loss of which turned the scale against him in his law-suit, and lost him his estate. I always believed, though many were of a different opinion, that Field was the thief, and I tried in vain to find him. He must have absconded at the time, or we must have traced him. Is it not more than probable that we may find our missing property in that box of his?"

"It is possible, unless he turned it into money in his lifetime. I suppose it is of value still?"

"If Hastings Delmar be alive, it would give him a claim on the whole estate, which the

other side would find hard to withstand, if he were able to bring it into court. That would be an after consideration. We have got to find the deed, as well as the man. You think Moltke has got the latter—will you help us to get at the former?"

"It would be an understood thing, of course, that Field's widow would be borne harmless, and that I might promise her some kind of reward for giving up possession. I am inclined to think he had a secret, for that loan society our friend Sibthorpe is encouraging, tried all they knew to get it out of him. I am not sure whether they guessed its purport, but Gawford must have had some suspicion, if he was aware of yours."

"Gawford? To be sure he must, if he knew the man, but I am not certain that he did. I never had more to do with that sleek, smooth fellow than I could help, and I am sorry to find he has made himself a footing at Sibthorpe's. I've heard of that Society of his, and it is nothing in the world but a swindle—that is my firm belief."

"Mine is pretty much the same," said the doctor, "but I have not yet the means of

proving it. What I want to be sure about is this: what motive has Gawford for telling Mrs. Delmar that he believes her son to be living?—and has the young man anything to fear from him, or others, should he be discovered, and induced to return?”

The old lawyer shook his head, and rubbed his spectacles dubiously. “If we could clear up the mystery of that cheque, we need fear nothing else in comparison. His mother paid as many of his debts as she could, and if we found that deed, his prospects would not be at all bad. My private fear is lest some cleverer chield, as Scott says, should have been there before us; and if nothing is found among those papers, I shall have your smooth secretary watched. Don’t ask me how—I have my own sleuth hounds and gazehounds, though I don’t often take the trouble to lay them on a scent. I hope, from what you tell me, I may have been mistaken about young Delmar, for I certainly did think his being drowned was the best thing that could have happened. Don’t tell his mother—I’ll make her forgive me yet.”

CHAPTER V.

It had been observed by the other members of the Friend-in-Need Committee, that the matron had not been looking well the last few days. Her nerves seemed to have had a shock ; dark rings round her eyes betrayed restless nights, and the sudden opening of a door made her start almost convulsively. So new was all this in one so self-contained as Rachel, that it is no wonder if her friends became uneasy, not to say suspicious, and watched her more closely than they had been accustomed to do. Her affectionate sister, Mrs. Stoker, in particular, was extremely curious on the subject, and resolved to leave no stone unturned that might reveal the secret.

“They are up to all sorts of tricks, by their

own showing," she thought, "and I'll not risk my money among 'em without knowing it is safe. As to believing a word they tell me, I'm not quite such a silly as that comes to, neither. Wolf is the only one to be trusted of the whole lot."

The person thus thought of has only been hitherto casually alluded to, but he must now be more formally introduced.

He was the official on whom devolved the delicate task of inquiring into the characters of applicants, making their personal acquaintance, and extracting from their own lips whatever information they would have been wiser to have kept to themselves. In plain parlance, he was an accomplished spy;—one to whom honour was a mere conventional form of expression;—who would listen anywhere, open anything, and sell anybody for a consideration; but who was a sufficiently good man of business not to undertake sales for more than one employer at a time. Like the Free Companions of old, his services belonged to the chief whose pay he drew, and as long as he drew it he could be relied upon.

What his real name was nobody exactly

knew ; his cunning and perseverance in following the track of a secret had gained him the sobriquet of the "Wolf," and it had gradually become his acknowledged title, as well deserved as that of many a baron in the Middle Ages. He had, moreover, a lean, hungry look, and grey bristly hair and moustache, and a swift stride that got over the ground without appearing to be in a hurry ; and his voice had a deep hollowness about it ; and it was pleasantly observed by some students of popular science, that, take him as a whole, he either must have been a real wolf once, or would be one in his next transition. He was in the habit of joking on the subject himself, and claiming to be a distant cousin of Romulus and Remus.

That he had been educated for a higher vocation was certain. His birth and parentage had often been the subject of discussion, and it was shrewdly believed that he had as good reason for concealing the gentility of his origin as Gawford for ignoring the obscurity of his own. Degraded as he was, both in position and habits, there was still something about Wolf that had once been a gentleman's bearing,

and which Gawford, with all his pains, could never assume.

It was this, perhaps, which had first attracted Martha's favourable notice, and he had not been slow, either in perceiving the impression he had made, or in deepening it by his deferential regard to everything connected with her personal comfort.

She soon discovered that it was a great convenience to have Wolf as an attendant when she wanted to go about London; he knew all the short cuts, all the great buildings, and all the cab-fares, and was never out of humour, out of patience, or out of breath. He escorted her more than once to the City on business, and very glad she was too of his arm over the crossings and through the crowded streets; and on these occasions they grew more and more friendly and confidential, though, with her habitual cunning, Martha never dropped a hint on the subject at home.

Her father had long been in the habit of exercising a tyrannical authority over this man—his hired serf, whose only duty was to do his bidding. Scanty pay and hard words were all the visible fruits of Wolf's labour, but

he never complained. He was not unmindful of his own interests the while: where he gathered one secret for his master, he generally stored away another for himself; and if it were true, as some reported, that he had once been in the detective force, and was dismissed for irregular habits, there could be no doubt that body had somehow thrown away a great opportunity.

On the subject of John Field the spy had a great deal to bear. Large as the hopes his opinions had raised, was the obloquy with which their downfall was repaid—and Mr. Jowett told him, in no measured terms, that at this rate he was not worth his salt.

“We don’t give you fifteen shillings a week only to loaf about and take a glass or two with new-comers, and nothing to come of it—I can tell you that; and if you lead us on a wild-goose chase again, you’ll just have to look about you for a situation where they can afford to keep you to look at—do you hear?”

The spy only bowed submissively; he made no attempt to argue. He had his own reasons for thinking the chase was not over yet, but he refrained from any remark, even when Gawford

sneeringly asked if he had made any valuable discoveries lately. Considering that Wolf had said the man Field would prove a gold mine, it was highly satisfactory to have so valuable an assistant bringing them in such prizes.

Wolf only shook his head gently, and hummed a verse of the Irish melody—

“Hath love, to thy soul so tender,
Been like our Lagenian mines,
Where a sparkle of golden splendour
All over the surface shines?
But if in pursuit you go deeper,
Allured by the gleam that shone——”

“None of your impertinence, sir,” said Gawford, haughtily. “If you forget your place, you will have to be reminded of it. Take these papers at once to the post, and don’t stay dawdling at half a dozen places on the way, for I shall want you to go somewhere else.”

The man took the papers in silence, and went on his errand. This was only a specimen of the kind of treatment he received, for though Rachel was more civil in speech, she ordered him about without the least scruple, and never seemed to care whether he were hot or cold, hungry or tired. They had bought him for

fifteen shillings a week, and had a right to work him well.

Now, she was not aware that he ever watched her. He was too clever at his business to let any one find him out; but on that night when she followed Gawford to Field's lodgings, Wolf had followed her, had seen her come out after every one else had been some time gone, and had marked the expression of her face. By the manner in which she kept one hand hidden under her shawl, he was convinced she had something to carry out which had not been carried in; and while his employers were grumbling at his stupidity and their own want of success, he was putting this and that together, and forming a neat little theory of his own. Her altered looks did not escape him. Mrs. Stoker told him in private that her sister got no sleep, and seemed sometimes half beside herself with headache, and that she didn't like this sort of thing. Before she would put her money into a queer business of this kind, she would rather know more about it first—a prudent resolve, in which the faithful Wolf sedulously encouraged her.

There was a small, damp back room behind

the office, where a printing-press was kept, worked by Wolf in the Society's service. Here were thrown off those literary successes in the way of circulars, appeals, prospectuses, and annual reports, to which the Friend-in-Need owed so much of its success; and of this apartment, such as it was, the spy was in some sense the proprietor, nobody else understanding how to set up the types, or pull off the sheets. It had been ascertained, by personal experiment, that conversation carried on in the outer office was inaudible in the printing-room, and therefore no one suspected that it could be used for private observations, as it really was. Long practice in his trade had enabled the spy to make sundry hidden arrangements in the partition wall by which he could both hear and see undiscovered; such honourable proceedings being in favour with gentlemen of his profession, and considered rather creditable than otherwise.

To this watch-tower he had retreated one afternoon, ostensibly to set up proofs of a new flourishing circular for Christmas, in which a special mention was made of the distress in Paris, and the exertions the Friend-in-Need was making for all the sufferers in the war

there and elsewhere, but in reality to note all the visitors received by the matron. They had been of various kinds—one in particular, a nervous, elderly man, in large black gloves very ragged at the fingers, and with a hat whose want of nap he was perpetually trying to hide by smoothing with his elbow, and who petitioned in humble, imploring accents for a loan of twenty pounds, to save himself and a large family from dishonour, not to say starvation. It would be repaid by instalments, as he received his own pay—he would pledge himself to punctuality and eternal gratitude—and his tears flowed as he spoke, and he tried to get hold of Rachel's hand, but she kept herself entrenched behind her desk and her dignity. His name and address—such as he chose to give at least—were duly registered, his fee was taken, and he was dismissed with some words of hope, while she made a note of the transaction, for the benefit of the observant Wolf.

“That will be a job for me,” thought that functionary, as he comforted himself with a quiet pinch of snuff; “an old party who wants to be saved from dishonour is pretty sure of not having much honour to lose. But

he may have a situation, and he may have something to tell, so there will be a shilling voted for expenses to-morrow night. Odd, now I come to think of it, that I am sure I have seen that face before !”

He had not traced the mystery home, when an untidy woman in mourning hurried into the office, her bonnet strings half undone, and her breath coming in short gasps from her haste and excitement.

The instant she appeared, the matron rose from her seat, not to greet her visitor, but to look down the street, and then close and secure the outer door ; her next step was to lock the one communicating with the house, and thus secure, as she thought, entire privacy to herself and the new-comer.

“The foggy air oppresses my chest,” she said, as a sort of excuse for the action. “I did not expect you at such an hour, Mrs. Field. I hope nothing is the matter at home. Sit down and rest a minute.”

“I don’t know about resting, miss, I’m sure,” half sobbed, half pouted the widow, as she took the chair. “It’s little rest *I* can get, night nor day.”

"You want change of scene. If you had any friends in the country that you could go to with your children—" suggested Rachel, with more kindness than she was in the habit of showing to unprofitable applicants.

"I don't know about that, Miss Jowett—I don't seem to know anything now no more than the man in the moon," protested Mrs. Field, with a vagueness of meaning, as well as of grammar, that was evidently unsatisfactory to her listener. In a voice of grave rebuke, she recommended her to try and recollect herself, as she had no time to waste in attending to nonsense; whereupon the widow burst into tears, and what she said during that outburst was lost to the audience in the printing-office. By degrees, however, her voice rose again, and her language became more coherent.

"So he came this very morning, Miss Jowett, and asked who had been poor John's employers, and when he left them—and if there were no more papers besides those in the box, and looked at me so hard, I declare I shook like a jelly, I did; and though I told him I had no more, he didn't believe me, I'm sure. And he said, Miss Jowett, that parties might

be willing to pay handsome for anything really valuable—that was how he put it;—parties whom it concerned, he said, and who would be much obliged to me for bringing it to light.”

“Indeed!—and did he happen to mention what such parties would say of your dead husband if they did find anything valuable that concerned themselves—that he was a thief, who had stolen the property of his master’s clients?”

“No, Miss Jowett, he never did, and it’s downright cruel in you to say such a thing!”

“I say it because it is true; any valuable document your husband concealed must have belonged to some client of the firm, and instead of rewarding you for the discovery, the parties would say, of course, that you had helped in the fraud. A nice prospect for you and your children to begin life with such a character!”

“But, Miss Jowett, ma’am—those papers you took——”

“And paid for—well?”

“You don’t mean that they could bring shame upon us all like that, do you?”

“I advise you, Mrs. Field, seriously, to ask

no questions. So long as you know nothing, you can tell nothing, and if you were put on your oath to-morrow, the cleverest lawyer could not make you criminate yourself. All I can say is, you are very lucky in having only me to deal with. It may—I do not say it has—but it may have saved you from a great danger. Keep that in mind, and hold your tongue, or if you must answer questions stick to the plain truth, that you have no more papers. I suppose that is the truth?”

“Oh yes, Miss Jowett.”

“Very well; then keep quiet, and leave me in peace, for if I were to turn round upon you, in return for your worrying me——”

“I did not mean to—indeed I did not, Miss Jowett, and I am sure you are very good—and Mrs. Trigger, she is quite civil and pleasant now about the rent and the children, and it used to be awful work with her sometimes when one couldn’t pay her to the minute;—and I know it is all along of your speaking to her. I hope I’m thankful, I’m sure; but, you see, I am that terrified and shook out of my very senses by all that is come and gone, and I wake up in the night and fancy he is asking

for his drink, or that I hear his spoon rattle against the glass—I do indeed—and then I shake, ready to shake myself out of bed.”

“Very foolish of you,” said Rachel, passing her handkerchief slowly across her forehead and lips. It struck Wolf that her voice had grown suddenly hollow.

“It is foolish, I dare say, ma’am, but it will come across me, that if I hadn’t left him that dreadful night——”

“To get in comforts for him and the children, remember.”

“Just so, Miss Jowett, thanks to you, and badly enough we just wanted them; but then, if I only knew I had never taken my eyes off him, I could be sure; and now——”

“Yes, yes, I understand, and it is only natural. Your spirits have been very much tried, and you fancy things. Look here!—get yourself a bottle of wine as you go home, and take a glass as soon as you can. I am quite sure change of air and scene will be your best cure. Why don’t you emigrate?”

“What, with all those little ones, Miss Jowett?”

“Of course; the colonies would be the best

place for a large family. The children would be a fortune to you as they grew old enough to work. I shall come and talk it over with you soon; and if you conduct yourself well, I may lay it before the Society, as a case for a little extra help. Now, go home, and don't forget the wine."

"I won't, Miss Jowett, and thank you kindly, I'm sure."

Rachel let out her visitor, and watched her down the street before returning to her writing. As she sank on her seat, a sigh escaped her, which seemed to come from the very depths of her heart. The attempt to resume her occupation proving futile, she laid down the pen, and sat with her two hands pressing her temples, as if striving to collect her thoughts, or to stop the intolerable throbbing. The spy was deliberating whether his best course would be to wait for further intelligence, or act on what he had obtained, when the entrance of Gawford decided the matter. He must hear what passed between these two, who were very wary of being overheard or seen together.

The attitude of Rachel seemed to startle her lover a little, and though she roused herself at

once, and tried to smile, he shook his head, and remarked with unusual solicitude on her jaded looks. She over-exerted herself; she ought to have a little recreation now and then. Would not her sister go out with her, or even run down to Brighton for a week for change of air?

At the mention of the remedy proposed by herself to her previous visitor, a faint, ghastly smile flickered across her face. Change might do her good, she admitted, but they could not afford it except when it forwarded business. She had a plan which might answer both purposes, and that was to open a branch of the Society in one of the winter watering-places—Westerton, for instance, where he had some acquaintance already, and where they had once possessed a subscriber. She had been told the climate would suit her, and had very little doubt the speculation could be made to answer.

The proposal seemed to take Gawford a little by surprise. He stood leaning upon the desk at which she sat, and there was an uneasy restlessness in the movements of his fingers, as he passed them, now over his hat, and now

through his hair, as if he could not quite make up his mind as to his answer.

Before he had decided, she had collected herself, and now looked him steadily in the face.

"It is very certain that we shall not carry on the war at this rate; we must strike out boldly, if we are to make anything by the business; and this seems as fair a method as any other at this time of year. Indeed, you mentioned it once yourself, I remember."

"I dare say I did, Rachel; but not with the idea of losing your society. You seem to think nothing of leaving mine."

"You will know where to find me," she replied, with a laugh so discordant that he almost recoiled; and in another moment, as if the sound had dissolved a spell, she burst into a paroxysm of tears—tears so evidently caused by anguish, not temper, that his compassion was as much stirred as his cold nature would permit. He drew her into his arms with unusual tenderness, soothing her with a few expressions of affection, which her thirsty spirit drank in as if they had been a stream in a desert.

"James, James," she murmured, "if I could but be sure of you, I should care for little else.

I have worked, and planned, and thought much more for you than for myself. I wanted to make money that I might hand it to you, but I don't believe you care for me a bit—not as you did once—and since you have taken to going down to Westerton——”

“Now, my dear girl, what grievance can you have to complain of about Westerton? I go there as I do to other places, in the way of business. I was in hopes we might make a good thing of it at one time, but you see how it is—whatever we gain, your father takes the lion's share, and there is no chance of our settling unless we can find a big nugget for ourselves, and make our own profit upon it. If you can show me how to do that, at Westerton or elsewhere, you will soon see whether I care about you or not.”

She clung to his supporting arm, and shivered like a frightened child.

“I can show you,” she faltered, “but you will hate me when you know—oh, my love, my love!”—as she felt him stroking her hair, “promise me you will be kind and gentle with me—promise that you will love me always—and I will tell you everything. I feel I can while

you are near. If you were to leave me, I should never find the courage again."

He promised all she asked—promises come readily enough at such a crisis—and, with her head on his shoulder, she poured out her confession ; his face, which she could not see, but which Wolf saw plainly by the gaslight, revealing more than one change of emotion as the tale went on. When all was told there was a short silence, only broken by her sobs. Then Gawford, by a little gentle force, made her sit down at her desk, and stood over her with a grave authority that showed at once how their several positions had changed.

"Show me those papers," was all he said, and she obeyed without resistance. He took them from her trembling hand, and his own shook with exultation as he turned them over. Gaining by degrees sufficient courage to look up in his face, she too saw there the working of more passion than she had believed to be in his nature ; and, strange to say, instead of repelling, the revelation made her respect him the more. For the first time in their intercourse, she felt that he was the stronger of the two, and woman like, even while crouching in

self-abasement beneath his eye, she loved him as she had never loved before.

"Rachel," he said, presently, "I am glad you have told me the truth. Now I shall know how to act. If this had come to light, and you had been put into the witness-box, nothing could have saved you. As it is you are in danger, and I shall arrange about your going out of town—to Westerton, if you like; only remember this—to deserve my confidence, to make me overlook what you have told me, you must put yourself in my hands entirely, and work with me, under my directions. I see a great opening for us, but I must think it well over, and I must be sure you will obey me implicitly and without question. These papers of course I shall take possession of; they are too dangerous to be left here. Is there anything else you wish to say?"

"Only this, James: remember your promise."

"Am I not remembering it?" He stooped and kissed her humbled forehead, which sank beneath his touch; and after a few words, inaudible save to themselves, they separated. Rachel turned down the gas, and the spy's occupation was gone for that evening.

CHAPTER VI.

LEONOR'S JOURNAL.

"Dec., 1870.

. . . "How very unlike my present life is to what it was last year in this very house. I wonder if I should have believed it if any one had foretold me then what was coming to pass. Time slips away; the days are gone before we can reckon them, and each is too short for all there is to do. And yet here am I, late at night, finding myself so inconveniently wide awake, that I have begun this journal as a safety-valve to my superfluous animation—a vent for a great many thoughts and opinions which I cannot safely express elsewhere. I have often wondered at the patience of autobiographers, and now I am treading in their steps. My future biographer,

whoever he may be, will, I trust, be grateful, for without my help, I defy him to appreciate all that is peculiar in my present situation.

“My household is as oddly composed as if we had all been cast together on a desert island. Indeed, I feel sometimes as if we had, and as if I were the gallant commander, on whose courage and resources all the rest depend for keeping up their spirits. My dear Aunt Mary, Mrs. Caddis and her children, the two Thorntons and Nurse Winny, Duncan and Hannah, and above all Puss and Rufus, can scarcely be looked upon as any but a curiously selected crew—not reckoning the medical officer, whose visits depend on the canoes of the savages. So far, however, we have gone on harmoniously enough over our bread-fruit and cocoa-nuts; and there has been no absolute necessity, as yet, for knocking anybody down with a handspike, whatever that instrument may be, with which captains are wont to show their presence of mind in emergencies. Perhaps one reason may be that the captain’s hands have been full of other things; as I am free to confess, had I only been more at leisure, I could have found it in my heart to

mast-head or handspike Mrs. Caddis two or three times a week.

“What is there about that woman that has such an effect on my temper?—an effect so lively, that I find it perilous to stay with her alone. She patronises Aunt Mary, and takes all her goodness to the children as a matter of course; and yet Aunt Mary is never cross, never even shows that she is bored, but works for her, and listens to her, with that innate politeness of hers, which nothing, not even a desert island, will disconcert;—like poor Marie Antoinette at the guillotine, apologising to Sanson for touching his foot in making her last step in this world. Something more than royal courtesy, I know, is the secret of this patience. She has adopted the belief in Archer’s identity with Hastings, and by listening readily to all Mrs. Caddis’s rambling talk, she may now and then hear him mentioned—be told some story of his cleverness, or his stupidity, just as it happens—and for the chance of such crumbs, she would sit all day at the woman’s feet. My only comfort is, that Felicia Caddis does not know the secret of her power; if she did our lives would be unbearable. It is hard enough

now to know that some people believe the house to be rightfully hers, and that I have no business in it at all; and that others look upon her as the mistress of the establishment, and on me as her confidential manager. I sometimes doubt whether she may not have found it convenient to allow this last mistake to spread among some of the tradespeople, and that those parcels which are sent in so civilly have been obtained on the credit of her heiress-ship, in which case we shall have stormy weather off the island by-and-by, and it will be lucky if the rest of the crew escape with dry jackets. I question 'dear Cousin Philip' paying extra bills, if one may judge from the irregularity with which her weekly expenses are defrayed. Furnished apartments would be a hazardous speculation if nobody paid better than this afflicted lady, but if I had to pay her for remaining I should do it, sooner than break the thread of hope by which my darling believes she has a hold of that unhappy boy.

"How will that vision end? Will she hold out, with this hunger at her heart, sharper than that of the poor Parisians?—and if she does,

will it at last be satisfied ? I dare not attempt to answer the questions myself ; I long to set off to the German head-quarters, tell my story to the brave old king, and get leave to go into the beleaguered city and look for the missing son. But such longings only remind me that there is no escape from the desert island, and we can only hoist signals of distress and hope for rescue. I ought to take a lesson from her faith and patience. I know she spends half her time in prayer, and is full of trust. I wish I could do and feel the same, but then I am not a pattern, and never was ; and if my heart indeed be cold, my worst enemies could not say the same of my temper. I can manage to hold it in, but how it can pull, nobody knows but myself.

“Next to my afflicted lodger, no one makes it pull harder than her friend Mr. Gawford, who has taken to coming much oftener than can be necessary, and in whose company I always feel as if I were close to a caged wild beast, without being sure that the door is bolted. So long as the creature believes itself to be shut in, one is safe ; but if it should happen to jump up and shake the door, there

would be a pretty general dispersion of the admiring spectators. Not all his personal civilities to myself can divest me of this secret doubt and fear. He has made Aunt Mary tremble, who never knew fear before ; and I am convinced he has some private end in view—to extort money, I suppose—which makes him take an interest in the possible return of Hastings. On her account I am civil to him, though I do not believe he can either help or harm us in reality ; and if I had my own way, I should send him about his business at once.

“Those two young girls are my most refreshing objects of interest—their *naïveté* and freshness amuse me ; and now they are become my pupils, I am able to exert an amount of authority, which is very convenient in letting apartments. Two of the young Longleys come three times a week to join the music, and I make little Lily take her share gratuitously. In quickness of ear, I must say, she excels them all. It is something to revive my old taste for music, which has been buried the last five years ; and it does Aunt Mary good to sit in the room, and give us the benefit of her judgment. Sylvia owns to thinking it

all a great bore, but the hope of winning a word of praise from her brother, when he comes down, keeps her in order—as well as anything can. It is necessary to make that last reservation, for when once the spirit of mischief fairly gets possession, there is no calculating what she may not do or say. I do not believe there is a grain of malice in her disposition, but of heedlessness there is an overflowing measure, and I am thankful they still have that nice nurse in attendance to take the responsibility off my shoulders. The other sister is a more interesting study. She is a girl of strong feelings, which have been dangerously repressed, and much of her future happiness will depend on their being kept in a healthy state now. Her love for her brother is quite a passion; nothing really gives her pleasure that is not in some way connected with him—whether it be study, accomplishment, or handiwork; and her talk, when most confidential, is of the time when she will be at the head of his table, keeping his house, and helping him in all his benevolent undertakings. Poor little thing! she looks as fit for such a life as old Rufus does; but it would be cruel to

damp her expectations, and I do all I can to encourage her, showing her my account books, and imparting some of my own sublime experience in the toilsome mazes of house-keeping and servant ruling—calling in Aunt Mary when I am at a loss, who slightly astonishes poor Dora by unconsciously revealing what her expenditure used to be. Besides these dull details, we have our charitable duties to discuss, and now I am left to my own discretion in those matters, I know where to find her as many objects for her good-will and industry as she can desire.

“All this makes us very good friends on the whole, and yet I sometimes fancy there is a little distrust and suspicion in her manner, as if something had been suggested to make her doubtful of my motives. This generally happens after my friend Mrs. Caddis has been favouring her with her company, so it is easily accounted for. I can truly say I would do anything to please them, and make them feel at home; and I hardly think they can themselves look forward more heartily than I do to the Saturday afternoon train, which brings, or ought to bring, the doctor.

“I never met with any one who so soon inspired me with confidence, or whose presence gave me so complete a sense of comfort and security. The whole being of the man seems to be so permeated with truth and earnestness, with tenderness for the weak, and leadership for the strong, that I find myself listening for his step, and treasuring up his words as if he were an old trusted friend and guardian, and not the accidental acquaintance of a few weeks. Perhaps the fact of having lived these last five years in such narrow-minded companionship as that poor lady’s was, may have disposed me to over-estimate the generous strength of a man’s nature, the quick comprehension, the large charity, the noble contempt for subterfuge and pretence, the apostolic fashion of dealing with duty and the claims of others—whether rich or poor. I never could endure those set occasions on which Miss Sibthorpe convoked her half-dozen old women, to receive their dole and pay their tribute of thanks; to see them standing all of a row, curtsying humbly as she came in, and kept standing while she sat at the table and asked them imperious questions, one by one, used to make

me long to apologise to them for our incivility, and to beg them to sit down while I handed them some tea. And Dr. Mordaunt has evidently the same feeling of respect for the old and the weak. I love to see him with his sister Dora ; she would not doubt my sincerity long if she knew how I sympathise with her happiness in having him by her sofa, listening to all her little confidences, and ministering as much to her mind as to her body. I do not wonder at the manner Nurse Winifred worships him, after what she has told me of his goodness, and the heroism he has shown in times of epidemic, penetrating into the worst parts of London, and risking his life over and over again, without so much as thinking it worth mentioning. Such lives are a nation's strength, and the more they risk them, the stronger she is; for self-devotion has the power of working after death, and the night that cometh to egotistical labour never darkens upon theirs.

“How kind he is to my dear one ! He has given her new life, she says ; and I can see it is true. If she weathers this trying winter of suspense—suspense aggravated by the dread of what may be happening while we set helpless

here—it will, under God's mercy, be owing to his considerate attention to her feelings, no less than to his judicious treatment of her health. She and Angélique are, as he says, his pattern patients; for they never argue or rebel, let him order what he may. I wonder how he treats rebels, and how long they generally hold out.

“He has promised Dora that he will take a fortnight's holiday at Christmas, if possible, and nobody will practise anything that has not a violoncello accompaniment. I am afraid Albert's Latin suffers in consequence, but I cannot bring myself to stop his violin. It evidently has a special witchery for Aunt Mary, and her taste and criticisms have already refined his style. Poor boy, he looks terribly white sometimes, and I fancy he has a good cry when no one is near; but it makes him furious to hint that his eyes are red. Frank Longley tells me he is ‘all right,’ only he can't ‘sap,’ which is no fault of anybody's, as his brains are all in his fiddle, which Frank owns is a queer place to keep them in, but it is better than having none to keep. Bobby, on the other hand, pronounces him a dunce.

“‘I asked him my own self,’ says that wise infant, solemnly, ‘if he knew the seven wonders of the world, and he said no, he only knew the eighth, and that was *me*. Now, I’m not a wonder of the world, am I, Miss Rivers? Am I like the Colossus of Rhodes, or the Labyrinth of Crete, or the Hanging Gardens of Babylon?’

“I asured him I saw no likeness to either, which seemed to be a comfort.

“‘I tell you what, Miss Rivers,’ was his final verdict; ‘I don’t believe he knows *anything*. When I talked of Clovis and his Franks, he thought I meant his money!’

“‘I tried to convince my small professor that there might be points of knowledge, in music for instance, wherein Albert could teach even him something; but his answer was, that old blind Jerry could play the fiddle, which, I am sorry to say, is true, and I often wish he couldn’t. It seems, however, that Frank has begun music at school, and that Albert coaches him in private; and what is more, that the little violinist is looked upon as a genius by his school-fellows, and any of them will help him through his lessons for the sake of his

tunes afterwards. They talk of getting up a concert for the benefit of the poor in Paris, and of making Albert take a leading part. I am afraid the excitement will be too much for him unless he has rest from his books, and his education has been too long neglected already.

* * * * *

“A strange circumstance has occurred since I wrote the last paragraph, and one that makes me more uneasy than perhaps it should.

“I was busy upstairs this morning looking over accounts, when Hannah came up to say a person had called, who would be glad to speak to me. She has orders not to admit strangers as a rule, but had transgressed this time, as the person had asked first for Miss Sibthorpe, and showed much feeling on hearing of her decease. She had been very good to him once, he said, and he had come a long way to bring her a little present. Hannah did not like the idea of a present being lost, so hoped I would go down and speak to the party.

“ ‘He don’t seem a gentleman, and yet he ain’t quite a common sort of man, neither,’ was her comment, as I went downstairs; and the first word the stranger spoke confirmed the truth of her description. He was caressing the old cat when I came into the hall, and as I am always fidgety when those charges of mine are handled, I am afraid my voice may have sounded rather imperative when I requested him to leave her alone. He obeyed at once, with an apology that made me feel a little ashamed; and as pussy made a somewhat hasty retreat, observed that he remembered the fondness of the kind lady for animals, and he could not help stroking a creature she had loved. As an excuse for the liberty he had taken in calling, he went on to explain that he had once seen better days, and that some years ago Miss Sibthorpe had assisted him with the means of emigrating. For some time he had prospered, but ill-health and misfortunes had compelled him to give up farming, and he had returned to England, in hopes of getting less arduous employment. He had come to thank his benefactress, and bring her a trifle in token of gratitude. It was worth little

in itself, only as it was his own making, he had hoped she might accept it for the sake of the motive. It was a small box, as like one of those made by thousands in Switzerland and Germany as could well be; made, he assured me, only with a knife and a chisel. It was a great disappointment, he said, that the good lady would never know how he had remembered her when so far away. He asked about her last illness, and expressed himself with feeling; his language being just as Hannah said, not quite that of a gentleman, and yet something above the common sort; and it ended in his requesting me to accept his offering in Miss Sibthorpe's place. Now, I did not quite believe in that offering, and in spite of all his smooth speech, I had a general suspicion that something was wrong somewhere. I did not trust his eyes; they had a peculiar expression—impossible to describe exactly—but which put it into my head that he might be all the while taking note of the fastenings, and the best way of getting in and out.

“It was a relief when old Duncan made his appearance, showing that our household

was not unprotected, and we parted on civil terms, though I steadily declined his box. I went back to my accounts, and had hardly completed them when I was alarmed by the news that poor pussy was dying; flew to the kitchen, and found the poor beast in such agonies, I felt certain she had been poisoned. We tried every remedy we could think of, but to no purpose; the poor thing seemed to know I was doing all I could, and let me handle her, and pour things down her throat, but nothing would do. I suppose it is very weak to cry about a cat, but I have cried heartily over mine, and can think of nothing but her cruel fate, and the mystery that surrounds it.

“Of course our suspicions have fallen on the grateful stranger, but I can learn nothing about him by inquiries. What interest any one can have in driving me out of this house I cannot conceive; but it looks very like a deliberate plot, and the more I think of it the more uneasy I am. Rufus is lying at my feet; I have given strict orders that no one feeds him but myself, and if Mrs. Caddis presumes to defy my authority, as by her laugh she seems

to threaten, I shall have to make an example of her after all.

* * * * *

“My young people are all much excited about the ‘mystery,’ as they call it, and Frank has volunteered to keep watch with his gun at night, in case the poisoner should come with a dark lantern for poor Rufus. Albert is certain he could settle him in five minutes, if he could only manage to beg, borrow, or steal the drill-sergeant’s sword, which is as much the object of his desires as it was to Tom Tulliver. Lily has been most pathetic about ‘poor pussy,’ and wished that the doctor had been here to cure her as he cured Angélique. I echo the wish with all my heart, and look forward to Saturday.

“Nothing more has been seen or heard of the stranger, and in the absence of proof, I feel I may be accusing him falsely. Our local police take a long time to stir up into animation, and have a happy faculty for taking up the wrong person; and of all things I should object to appearing in court and swearing to the identity of anybody, whether guilty or

not, so the story will die away in a few days ; but I still feel doubtful, and as if I had not kept my charge. Poor Miss Sibthorpe !—she little knew what she was doing, when she made so much depend on those two lives.”

CHAPTER VII.

"WHY, Sylvia, what is it? Please, don't shake my sofa," said Dora, feebly, as her sister came flying into her room, after an absence of some hours.

"Dolly, I have had an adventure. Who do you think is staying here in lodgings with a sister in delicate health? Who but Nurse Crabtree?"

"Nurse Crabtree? What, do you mean Stoker?"

"Who else should I mean? Don't you remember in Holiday House, how from being a dreadful tyrant in the nursery, she was quite delightful when they went to pay her a visit; made them pancakes with jam inside, and I don't know what besides. Well, I have not had pancakes, but I had a good hunch of cake,

and more civil words than I thought she had in her vocabulary. Quite a pleasure to see me again ; hoped Miss Dora was better ; would I taste the cake my poor grandma was so fond of, and might she be allowed to come and see Miss Dora, and bring her a book which belonged to my dear grandma, which she might be glad to have ? Of course I knew you would be ready to forget and forgive, so I told her she might come when she pleased, and if she brings some more of that cake, all the better."

Dora's face flushed angrily. "How you could, Sylvia, when you know——"

"I know she used to be the plague of our lives, if you mean that ; but she cannot plague us now, so why not be friends if she wishes it?"

"I cannot change about with my friendships all in a minute," said Dolly. "I forgive her, of course ; but I don't want to see her, and I won't."

"Won't you really ? Now, do you know, Dolly, I thought because she had been so odious, you would be delighted to meet her halfway. I am sure all those pet books of yours preach that, over and over again."

"She is a false, treacherous woman," said

Dora, "and I only hope you were careful what you said."

"I don't think I was, particularly ; she asked me all sorts of questions, in her sharp way, you know, and I believe I answered them all. What did it matter ?"

"It matters a great deal if you gossip about other people's affairs."

"Don't be cross, Dolly ; the good girls in the books never are, you know ; at least, if they are by chance, they cry their eyes out afterwards."

Dora did not quite do that ; but Miss Rivers, coming in half an hour later, found her in such a state of nervous tremor, between dislike and compunction, that she took it upon herself to decide the visitor should not be admitted, until this agitation was quite overcome. She had Dr. Mordaunt's orders that his sister's nerves were to be kept tranquil, and Dora might be quite sure no one should come near her whom she did not wish to see.

"But, Miss Rivers, if she is really sorry and wants to show it, it will be dreadful in me not to forgive."

"Forgive, by all means, my dear, and the

sooner the better, for your own sake ; but do not make yourself ill by pretending to do it, when you cannot in your heart. I will go and see Mrs. Stoker myself, and explain that you are not yet equal to the exertion. As soon as you feel that you are, we can send and let her know."

It appeared, on inquiry, that the worthy woman was lodging with Mrs. Biggs, and when Leonor called, the latter detained her in the draughty passage full a quarter of an hour, while expatiating on the excellences of her new inmates. One was a charitable lady from London, belonging to some great Society "for helping respectable people when they was in trouble, as the most respectable will sometimes be, you know, ma'am, which I'm sure the time has been when I'd have been thankful if any one had give me a 'elping 'and when I wanted it badly enough but had no sawneying words for the ladies as some has, who seems all so smooth and 'umble before their faces, to get all they can, and grumbles behind their backs, because sixpences ain't shillings, which they never was yet, as I knows of." All said in a breath, with a keen sense of ill usage.

An inquiry for Mrs. Stoker led to the qualifying explanation that she was only the benevolent lady's sister, come down to take care of her, as she was quite knocked up with benevolence, and found the change to Mrs. Biggs's apartments quite like Paradise. Mrs. Stoker was out; a stirring sort of a body she seemed to be, as couldn't sit still ten minutes without getting the cramp—but here was Miss Jowett, just coming in: if Miss Rivers would leave a message.

And as she spoke, Rachel crossed the threshold, and Mrs. Biggs hastened to make them known to each other, a favour which the benevolent lady received with much humility of demeanour, and Leonor, with her usual easy politeness. She explained the object of her visit, and with a few civil words took leave, the dark heavy eyes of the new-comer following her steadily, as she went down the street.

"Very handsome, Mrs. Biggs," was her remark, as she turned to regain her own apartment.

"Always was thought so, ma'am," said Mrs. Biggs, emphatically, "and a great friend to

me, ma'am ; as she well may be, for her aunt, dear lady, lodged here some time, and would never have left but for being wanted to stay with her niece. Nice ladies both of them, and recommends me to all their friends, as my ladies always does—and my gentlemen too,” with a nod towards the parlour door.

“The gentleman is come then, Mrs. Biggs?”

“Yes, ma'am, just after you went out. A venerable-looking gentleman he is, too, ma'am ; it is wonderful he can do so much.”

“Ask him to be good enough to step up to my room,” said Rachel, walking languidly upstairs, without replying to the last observation. Mrs. Biggs looked a little puzzled at first, but soon complied with her lodger's wishes, by tapping at the parlour door, and finding it locked, delivering the message at the top of her voice—

“Mr. Ingleton ! Mr. Ingleton, sir ! Will you be so good as to step up to see Miss Jowett, sir, if you please ?”

The door was unfastened, and a white-haired man, in a kind of half military frock coat, stood before his hostess. He had not been losing time since his arrival, for his table was

already covered with papers, printed and in manuscript.

"I will wait on Miss Jowett immediately," he said, with a deep cough at the end of the sentence. "Short as my time may be in this world, it will be well spent if in her service."

"Dear heart, sir, you don't feel as if you was going to be laid up, do you?" asked Mrs. Biggs, whose objection to sick folk had often been expressed to Mrs. Delmar.

"No, ma'am, nothing immediate,"—with his hand on his chest, and another deep cough,— "but I have my warning, and it is at such times that true benevolence, like hers, is really appreciated."

"She must be a angel, too good for us, sir. If the folks about here gets to know it, they'll be ready to tear the house down for a sight of her."

"Therefore it is only to discreet, sensible ladies like yourself that I should mention the subject," returned Mr. Ingleton, who had meanwhile been locking up some of his documents, and arranging others. "With you, Mrs. Biggs, I know I am safe."

Mrs. Biggs curtsied, and watched him as he went upstairs, taking special note of his stoop, and somewhat laboured breathing.

"He is the very image of a hermit, if he had but a long gown, and a bell-rope round his waist, like the blessed old bein' in last week's *Cavern*" (Mrs. Biggs indulged in a penny serial of highly spiced character), "who meddles with everybody's business out of pure love. I wonder if Miss Jowett pays his expenses, and will stand a doctor for him? Two invalids in the house will be a chance for Dr. Bright. I'll step round by-and-by, and let his cook know."

"Come in," said Rachel, as a respectful knock fell on her door.

Mr. Ingleton entered, and stood, hat in hand, awaiting her pleasure. She eyed him from head to foot, and a slight smile passed over her face, as she signed to him to close the door. As he obeyed he gave another cough.

"You need not do that up here," she said, drily.

"Pardon me, Miss Jowett; this is the very room in which it must be heard. You wish to speak to me?"

"The siege has begun, you see," was her somewhat sullen reply, as she leaned back in her chair.

"And not without success," he added, "one outpost having been taken already."

"Do you run no risk of being known, should you meet any one who saw you that day?"

"Should you know me yourself?"

"Hardly, but for your eyes. You must get coloured glasses if you are likely to revisit Granville House."

"It would be safer if some one else made the next move. I presume the tactics remain the same—that it is only by starvation that the place will be brought to our terms?"

"If it ever is," said Rachel, thinking of the face she had just seen, in its bright and fearless energy such a contrast to her own.

"It must be brought," was the reply of her companion, "or the army must move on Austerlitz, instead of embarking from Boulogne. Delmar of Delmar might be more easily out-manceuvred."

"I have nothing to do with it," said she, wearily. "I wish it was all over."

"It will be soon, if we do not strike an early blow. Do you know that a letter has appeared in several of the papers, attacking what are styled speculating charities, and evidently describing the Friend-in-Need as the worst of them?"

"Is that by Dr. Mordaunt?"

"I conclude it is, and we must lose no time in countermining his mine, so as to hoist him with his own petard, so to speak. I have prepared your way here by judicious hints; and very little more will be enough to spread the report that you are a spring and channel of benevolence. In a place like this, the object must be to win the charitable, not the clients. I shall move about, visit the reading room, and reconnoitre the local papers, to see where I may place an article on medical carelessness in the administration of opiates."

Her heart gave a throb that turned her lips white with deadly sickness.

"Go down!" she said with a gasp, but as abruptly as if she had been ordering out a dog. He made a silent bow and retired, coughing judiciously all the way to his own room.

In spite of the cold of that stern December,

the miserable woman flung up the window, and leaned out of it for air, till a fit of shivering drove her back, and forced her to close it again.

“What is it that has come over me of late? Why do I see everything so differently, that whatever step I take only makes me more wretched? What have I to do with all those fine sounding terms of love, and charity, and goodwill to men? Oh, how beautiful some of them were—what a dream of lovely thoughts it was for a few minutes—and how horrible to wake up, and remember it was nothing to me! I must not attempt going to those services, even to keep up my reputation for goodness. It is enough to make the stones cry out, I should think—and that hymn is never out of my head; and yet it was only sung as a lesson by those children. They thought no more about the words than their own music-books. I wish I could shake them off as easily. They were laughing and playing tricks on each other outside the church door ten minutes afterwards—the words were nothing to them. I would give all I have, all I expect to make, just for five minutes to get out of myself, and

feel like a careless child. But it can't be—I cannot forget, even at night—and what is to become of me if I cannot sleep? There comes that tune again. How do the words run?

‘I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Come unto Me, and rest.’

What does it mean? I have heard such things before, but I never cared about the meaning; it all seemed part of those forms people go through as a matter of course, to appear respectable—but if, oh, if what that man said last night should be true, and these are the real things—what are we about? Oh, what am I—and what must I be to the end?”

An Advent evening service, but indifferently attended; a sermon, at whose close the preacher felt so disheartened with himself and his hearers, that he was ready to declare he would rather do the hardest parish work than write another; a hymn, in which more than one chorister was guilty of carelessness, and on which critics in the congregation spoke rather severely as they went home—had, in reality, been all the while doing a mission work, where it might have seemed quite hopeless. How

much oftener might such be wrought, if people were more in earnest in believing what they were doing, and meaning what they said !

Of these last, Dora was one, and directly the dread was removed of being obliged to see Stoker again, her conscience began to grow uneasy. Sylvia's words rankled after Sylvia had forgotten them. It was true that if she had been aggrieved by any one, that was the person to whom she ought to be specially kind ; and who could say whether poor Stoker might not be anxious to make it up, and be friends ? At any rate, there would be no peace in Dolly's heart till she had overcome this feeling of enmity ; and Martha received an invitation to call, which she carried to her confidential friend, Mr. Ingleton. That venerable gentleman gave her his best advice ; and accordingly, when she had handed to Dora the volume she had mentioned—one of no particular value, it may be observed—she turned to Sylvia with as much of a cordial smile as her features could control, remarking that she had not forgotten her taste for sweet things, and had taken the liberty of making her a few cocoa-nut cakes, after her poor grandma's recipe.

Sylvia's eyes grew round at the sight of the parcel ; the article was one for which Martha was famous, and it was on very rare occasions indeed that the young ladies had been favoured with a taste.

"This is kind of you, Stoker. I always used to say that cocoa-nut cakes were the first things I should make when I was cast on a desert island ;—but this is better still."

And without further ceremony, she fell to on the contents of the parcel, pitying Dora for being obliged to refrain. The children, followed by old Rufus, who seemed to find Lily the best substitute for his lost companion, entered at that moment, and were at once invited to partake. Lily did not like the taste ; but Albert was ready, and Rufus, seeing something good was going, looked at Sylvia with an expressive wag of his tail.

"You dear old dog, have you been forgotten for a minute ? That is too bad, considering all we owe you ;" and she was about to present him with a tempting fragment, when Albert interposed. Miss Rivers had desired that no one should feed Rufus but herself, and he had promised never to allow it.

"How cross of her!" said Sylvia, transferring the morsel to her own mouth. "Never mind, Rufus; when she goes to Hastings, we can do as we like, you know."

"When is she going to Hastings?" asked Albert, looking up in surprise.

"Oh, not till Paris is taken, of course, because he can't get out."

"Who can't?"

"The man, whoever he is. I don't know his name. Oh, and I forgot, it is a secret. Stoker, for your life don't tell anybody."

"A secret?" said Albert, "and you blabbing it all out like this!—Did she tell it you as a secret?"

"She didn't tell me at all; I found it out by accident. She'd be horribly vexed, I dare say, if she thought any one knew, so you must not go making mischief—do you hear?"

"I should say you had made quite enough," was his remark, as he whistled to Rufus, and walked off, without taking much notice of the visitor. Lily, however, as soon as he was gone, sidled up to Mrs. Stoker, to show her Angélique's white peignoir, and explain about her accident.

"She is still delicate, you know," she added, emphatically, "so we must not give *her* coconut cakes; but she may have sponge biscuits, the doctor says."

"Oh, may she, my dear? Very well; we will see about it, if she is good. I've got an invalid at home who likes them too."

"It must seem quite natural to you to have some nursing," said Dora, trying to be sympathising and kind.

"I'm never to be quit of it—seems to me, Miss Dora; but my sister Rachel would go and worry herself into a fever with other people's grievances, and as it's no use talking to her about it, so long as poor creatures come after her, she was ordered down here. It's a thankless sort of business, helping folks that do nothing but grumble."

"Oh, but helping the poor, the really poor, is a noble, glorious thing, Stoker," said Dora; "your sister is to be envied for being ill in such a cause."

"I'll tell her what you say, Miss Dora. I don't see the pleasure of it myself, but she may."

"And ask her to come and see me. I

should like to talk to her ; I am sure she could give me a great many hints. Do you think she would mind my asking her questions ? ”

“ Can’t say, I’m sure, Miss Dora, but I’ll give her your message. She is more of your way of thinking than mine, and that’s the honest truth. Good-bye, young ladies—good-bye, my little dear ; I’ll not forget the dolly.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE were at this time at Westerton two social circles, under leaders of decidedly opposite characters and opinions; and strangers in the place found, to their discomfiture, that to be admitted into one was by no means a recommendation to the other. Not that there was any enmity or malice on either side; but that, as a rule, what the one applauded the other objected to, and *vice versa*.

It had, therefore, grown into a natural order of things, that each coterie should go its own way, especially in matters of charity and benevolence; but on the occasion of a bazaar for the benefit of the poor in Paris, a strenuous effort was made by some of the more energetic of the promoters to bring about a coalition, in order to secure a better result. The difficulty

lay here: that Mrs. Bright's party delighted in doing everything without consulting the authorities, and Mrs. Longley would never stir a finger without the sanction of the Vicar of St. Paul's, under whose orders she and her daughters worked—and the vicar and his clergy had not smiled on the plan of a bazaar. They had proposed to give an offertory instead, which, to the ladies assembled in Mrs. Bright's drawing-room, seemed a very odd, not to say dull, way of expressing sympathy with Paris. A great deal of talking and consulting had already gone on about it, and a great deal more ill-will seemed likely to be the first fruits of the benevolent enterprise, when the vicar, becoming aware of the danger, unexpectedly withdrew his opposition; told Mrs. Longley anything was better than feud, and if her girls liked to make pincushions and kettle-holders for sale, by all means let them do it. He should make a point of going to the sale himself, and buying a new penwiper at Mrs. Bright's own stall. After this, there was no more to be said, and magnanimity became the order of the day—the honour and glory were to be Mrs. Bright's, and the Longleys would

assist to the best of their ability ; and of course went to work with a will, to prove that that ability was worth a dozen of hers. Consultations, and working parties, went on in the drawing-room of the doctor's wife with great amity and merriment. The elder Miss Longleys, being in immense request as quick and clever workers, with a genius for cutting and contriving, were most amiable towards the suppliants for help ; many of whom, with the haziest notions of putting a pincushion decently together, wanted to copy intricate housewives, and combinations in brown holland for holding everything—and expected somebody to put it all ready for them, and finish it off when they grew tired.

Of this class was Sylvia, though she would not acknowledge it. Adrian having sent them five shillings apiece for materials, she had speedily surrounded herself with cardboard, gold paper, gum, and silks, by means whereof she meant to amaze society, and realise fabulous profits ; and her devoted friend, Henrietta Longley, was alternately dazzled by her suggestions, and scandalised by her want of steadiness.

"You will waste all your materials, and all your time, if you do not take care," she said; "it is no use being so magnificent. Begin something, however small, and the grand ideas can work themselves out meanwhile."

"I hate small things. How are you to feed two millions of people that Bismarck says *he* won't, if you stop to make sixpenny pin-cushions and twopenny-halfpenny mats? I want to give something that will take people's breath away directly they come into the room."

"Then you had better do as Miss Luxton did—subscribe to that Society that has a drawing of prizes every year. She won that piece of embroidery two years ago, when she was in London, and as she has no use for it herself, she has given it to the bazaar."

"Oh, let me see!" cried Sylvia, jumping up, and scattering her goods far and wide, for her faithful friend to collect as best she might. The vision of a splendid prize was even more dazzling than that of a great invention; and though the donor of the embroidery was not present, Mrs. Bright was very communicative on the subject. She had herself had an inter-

view with the matron of the Society, a most interesting woman, come down to recruit, but quite ready to assist in any good work ; just the person to be of the greatest use in pricing the articles, and making up the accounts. The amount of good that was done by the Society, in a quiet way, seemed wonderful. Dr. Bright had met a clever man at the reading-room, literary he believed, who seemed to know a great deal about it, and who was highly indignant at some attack that had been made in one of the papers. Dr. Bright was so pleased with that Mr. Ingleton, he had thought of asking him to give them a lecture on the war and the siege—he seemed to know so much about it all—but his cough was too troublesome ; however, he had no objection to help in any way he could. Ah ! there was poor Mrs. Caddis—how brave of her to come out, in spite of her sorrows, and the cruel way in which she had been treated ! And while she was being welcomed, a look passed round the circle of ladies, which it was as well for the harmony of the meeting that the friends of Miss Rivers did not see.

Mrs. Caddis had, in fact, been some little

time in the room, and had been listening eagerly to the account of the Friend-in-Need. If ever anybody wanted such a friend in their lives, she was sure that *she* did ; and what was more, she must find one, somehow, without delay. The pleasant intercourse between herself and the obliging tradespeople had been suddenly blighted by a curt letter from Gawford, telling her that Mr. Sibthorpe had been informed she was running up bills, and using his name to obtain credit, and that he had angrily declared *he* was not going to pay them.

“Who your enemy can be that gave such information,” continued the letter, “I cannot say ; but you must find the money somehow, and stop the report, or I am afraid the consequences may be awkward.”

Very easy talking—where was she to find the money?—and who could have been the mischief-maker?—unless, which was not unlikely, Miss Rivers had set on Dr. Mordaunt to tell Cousin Philip. She had seen her look surprised at some of her purchases, and it was just like her spite to do her such an ill turn. But this did not help to discover the remedy,

and Mrs. Caddis heartily wished she had taken Albert's advice, not to spend money till she had got it. She had not ventured to tell him of her predicament, and dreaded his finding it out.

"Are you come to help us, Mrs. Caddis?" asked good-humoured Mrs. Bright. "You find us all busy, and I am sure we have your good wishes for success. What a mercy it was you escaped in time! My husband saw a letter by balloon post, that told the most distressing things about the scarcity and the cold. I cannot conceive how the sick and the old people can bear it; waiting hours and hours for their turn to get a scrap of horse-flesh, and such bread as you would not give to your pigs. And unless a supply is thrown in directly the gates are open, even surrender will not help them. Poor creatures! we shall have the most distressing scenes. I am so thankful, as I tell the doctor, that no one is there belonging to us. Every morsel I touch would almost choke me."

"Are not those accounts exaggerated?" asked Mrs. Caddis, nervously. It was always her safest refuge to hope they were.

"You would not say so, if you read this letter. I suppose we shall never know half. Is it not horrible to see our fires burning, and our dinners put on table, and not have it in one's power to give one of those poor dear souls a good warm, or a comfortable meal? Oh, thank you, Miss Longley; that is charming! You are never at a loss. I do believe if you were in Paris now, you would find some way of getting out of it."

"Not if I had to leave those I cared for behind me," said Miss Longley.

Mrs. Caddis hung her head and sat down. Hers was a nature that rarely saw or felt anything beyond the present moment, but something at her heart was quivering now, so that she hardly knew what was said or done next, till Mrs. Bright produced Miss Luxton's lace, and the conversation returned to the Friend-in-Need. One of their circulars was offered to her, and its alluring invitations to come and be helped, seemed to hold out the very resource she most wanted.

Philip must not be affronted; at all hazards that report must be stopped. What should she do, if he withdrew his allowance? Till

the siege was over, they must stay where they were, and then——

What would happen then she had not courage to think about.

She visited the interesting matron that afternoon, and was introduced to that clever literary man, Mr. Ingleton. The interview was a long one, and by the time it was over there was very little of her history left to find out. Their united skill was so far beyond her cunning, that all her habitual deceit could not save her from revealing the truth, and she left them with the consciousness of having committed herself and received only hopes in return.

As they knew by experience, it was not long before she came again: it was too late to repent now, the worst was over, and on whatever terms she must have the promised relief. This time the terms were made very distinct indeed, and the miserable woman would have given worlds never to have heard them, but it ended in her consenting to all. The money was advanced for her debts, and she endeavoured to find comfort in the pleasure of settling her accounts, and resolving that

she would never open another. Meanwhile, measures were being taken to ensure the early settlement of the last.

"Look here," said Martha to her sister, after her second visit to Granville House; "that fanciful child goes on asking to see you, and has taken up the notion that you are next door to a saint. I don't want to contradict her, but I can't keep it up; and you must go to-morrow, and there's an end of it."

"I would rather wait another week—there can be no such great hurry," said Rachel, wearily.

"Yes, but there is, if you please; the doctor is not coming down to-morrow, and there's no time like the present. I am not going to lend my money for nothing. The sooner all this is done the better. There'll be a little parcel ready for you to give that Mrs. Caddis. Don't you go making mistakes about *that*, now."

Rachel was silent, but a dark shadow passed over her face as she turned away. Its lowering expression did not escape Mrs. Stoker.

"Now, it ain't any use making black looks at me, and that I tell you. Your grand secretary may admire them, but I don't. I mean

to take care of myself and my money, and I'd as lief go up to the ladies and make my own bargain as not. That Miss Rivers is a fine young woman, and it seems a pity to turn her out of house and home for that foolish woman to step into 'em."

"Yes, it is a pity," said Rachel. But she made no more opposition to her sister's plan.

Dora had been thinking so much of this visit, that when Miss Jowett was announced, her courage and presence of mind seemed to fail; and Sylvia, whom no excess of reverence ever troubled, did the first honours by chattering about the bazaar, and the poor Parisians, who were eating the animals in their Zoological Gardens, or whatever they called them. Fancy elephant cutlets and rhinoceros soup! The old Roman emperors never thought of that. She was glad London was not besieged; the idea of dining off the wild beasts in the Regent's Park would be worse than no dinner at all.

Rachel shook her head.

"I suspect you never tried *that*, Miss Thornton."

"No but Dolly there would like to try it,

of all things, if she might give her dinner away. Do you know that the first time I saw her look downright delighted, for months and months, was one evening in London, when my brother let her pack up the cold chicken and tongue which would have been for her breakfast, to send to a poor sick man who couldn't eat his wife's horrid messes? I believe the man died; but that wasn't Dolly's fault, you know."

"How can you talk so, Sylvia?" said Dora, distressed. "You forget Miss Jowett does not understand your ways. I have several things to say to her in earnest, so suppose you go and finish your work, and come back presently."

"I suppose I must—that Paris is insatiable, and works me to the bone, so to speak; and if I don't make haste, Henrietta won't have time to finish off half I want her to do. It is very nice to have a bosom friend—they do all your disagreeable things for you, and think you are giving them a treat."

Away she went, singing, and Dora would have apologised, but her visitor interposed with a smooth remark that she had already heard a great deal of Miss Sylvia's delightful

spirits, as well as of Miss Dora's goodness, from her sister Martha.

"I wonder at that," said Dora, simply, "for she used to call Sylvia noisy, and me idle and selfish; but I suppose being with you makes her see things differently. What nice talks you two must have together, about your work, and the poor people in London—the distressed governesses and widows, whom you help so kindly to find situations, or to sell their needlework. It is wrong in me to say so, but I do feel I should not mind being weak half as much if I had lost my strength as you lost yours."

The soft words died away on Rachel Jowett's lips—the part she had played so long and so easily seemed suddenly to have become new and strange; and she sat by Dora's sofa with the gloomy, troubled expression in every feature, which had lately become so habitual.

But at first this was unnoticed. Dora had broken the spell of shyness and reserve, and her pent-up thoughts were rejoicing in the freedom of utterance. Had any one else been in the room it would have been different, but she was sure of a sympathising listener in this good, devoted matron, and she talked without

waiting for many answers, from the fulness of her heart—how she had learned from her dear, dear friends, now dispersed in different parts of England, that it was a privilege and an honour, as well as a duty, to serve the unfortunate, because it was the service which Christ considered as done to Him—which she had never thought about before. And then, how hard it had seemed, after being taught this, to be held back from doing it—but of course it was all for the best; she had to learn patience first, and the right way of doing the work. Adrian had cautioned her, that if you did not take the trouble to learn, you were pretty sure to do as much harm as good. And in London it must be difficult, because there seemed to be so many thieves and impostors.

“A great many,” said Rachel, bitterly; “enough to sicken any one of trying to help them; they will take every farthing you have in the world, and laugh at you for your pains.”

“You have found that, Miss Jowett?”

“Over and over again. Do not flatter yourself that it is pleasant work to deal with those classes—it is hateful. You see nothing but degradation, greediness, lying, and wickedness.

I often wish I might never set eyes on any of them again ! ”

Dora was silent; her enthusiasm was checked, and yet she felt that this was not the right way of looking at the matter.

“ I remember hearing something like that said to my dear friend,” she said, timidly at first, but more boldly as she went on, “ and he explained to us—I cannot give it in his words, but I never forgot their meaning—that the troubles and poverty in the world were meant to be turned into blessings, by giving us opportunities of serving God in our neighbour ; and that the tempter knew that so well, that it was his great object to make poverty mischievous and wicked, and that no one ever did the evil one’s work so thoroughly, as those who lead the poor, and the ignorant, and the tempted, to sin. It was even worse, he said, than robbing them of their money or their rights ; and yet I never saw him so angry as once when he detected a man in the act of cheating some poor widows out of their savings. He said that every coin man or woman gained by such practices would, some day or other, eat their flesh as it were fire.”

Again there was silence. Rachel's eyes were fixed on the carpet, on which her foot beat nervously. She would have laughed a few weeks ago, had it been foretold her then how she would tremble at the words of a girl of sixteen.

"And Adrian says it is too true," Dora went on, after a pause for breath, "and that London and all great towns swarm with tempters who prey on poverty and helplessness. It is this thought that makes it sad to be in London; and yet, when there are those who, like you and your friends, spend their lives in trying to save God's poor, one ought only to feel ashamed of one's own uselessness, and help you as much as possible. I do hope when I get stronger I shall be able to do something. I look forward to keeping house for my brother; and perhaps, you know, Miss Jowett, you will trust me by that time, and let me know some of your most urgent cases."

"By that time, my dear," said Rachel, as quietly as her trembling lips would allow, "you will have changed your mind, and will scorn me and my advice."

"You think so? I dare not contradict you ;

but I do mean it—indeed I do. Look here, Miss Jowett, the only money I have is from my brother, so I think I ought to consult him about any I give away. But this is my very own ; papa gave it me, and I love it dearly. It is a guinea, and they always fetch their full value, I believe. Will you take it as a favour, and spend the money on some of your poor women ? Perhaps you know that case my sister spoke of—Mr. Field, the clerk ? Do you know the family ?”

“ Yes.”

“ He left a widow and children, did he not ? ”

“ He did.”

“ Will you spend it on them ? I mean if you think it best. I want to make a beginning, if you will help me.”

Rachel took the guinea, and detained the little hand in hers. There was a dull aching in her throat, and a weight at her heart, that made her long to throw herself on the unconscious little monitor's neck, and pour out such a revelation as would have made her eyes, “ like stars, start from their spheres,”—but she controlled herself ; emotion was too dangerous,

and the child would only be frightened and made ill. What did it all matter now? It was too late for her to think of these things. Her lot was cast, and she must abide it, only she would not come again. She could not stand this sort of thing—it would haunt her all night. And she murmured something about fatigue and headache, which filled Dolly with compunction and sympathy. She rang her hand-bell, which Nurse Winifred promptly answered, and begged her to bring in some tea or wine for Miss Jowett.

The nurse turned to look at the visitor, and Dora saw directly that something was wrong. Rachel drew herself up with cold civility, begged Miss Thornton to excuse her, but she must wish her good afternoon. She felt too unwell to remain, and she was sure the nurse would say she had tired Miss Thornton already. Nurse Winifred only curtsied, but said not a word to detain her, and looked very grave when Dora held out her hands and begged her to come again soon.

“You will see I shall not be allowed,” was Rachel’s answer, with a sarcastic glance at the nurse. “My way of life makes as many

enemies as friends, Miss Thornton, and with better memories. Good-bye, and thank you, if I do not see you again." She was half down the stairs, when she perceived that Winifred was following her. "Do you want anything?" she asked, stopping short.

"Miss Jowett, it is not my place to judge you, or to say who should or should not come to see those young ladies, but I give you fair notice, that if I told Dr. Mordaunt where I last met you, and the whole of that story, I very much doubt if he *would* ask you to call on his sisters again."

"He need not fear. I shall not intrude upon them," said Rachel, in her old professional voice. "It was only at Miss Thornton's urgent request I came at all. I am too accustomed to ingratitude to be seriously hurt by what any one can say of me behind my back."

"Ingratitude! Behind your back! Do you forget that poor young lady paid you a heavy fee to get the situation abroad you promised her, and had all the expense of going, and found it a complete take in; and the agent, whose address you gave, treated her with insolence, and insulted her character; and she came

back in such a state of want and misery, that if Mr. Duke hadn't found her out she might have died in the streets? I'll say nothing behind your back that I won't to your face, and I would rather not have to say anything; but if such kindness as yours expects gratitude, I should be sorry to share the sort you are likely to get."

As the last words were spoken—not loudly, for Winifred's voice was always gentle, but with the warmth of honest indignation—Leonor crossed the hall below, and looked up in surprise.

"Is anything the matter, nurse?"

"No, ma'am. Miss Jowett complains that she and Mr. Gawford meet with so little gratitude, and I was speaking my mind about it. I beg your pardon, ma'am."

"You are a friend of Mr. Gawford's, Miss Jowett?"

"Yes, ma'am. I am the matron of the Society to which he is secretary."

"Ah, true; Miss Sibthorpe subscribed to it. Was she ungrateful for his services—or is there any complaint against us?"

"I have never heard him mention you,

Miss Rivers, with anything but respect and admiration."

The proud flush of Leonor's cheeks, and the flash of her dark eyes, were not lost on Rachel, but she little knew with what difficulty the young lady restrained herself from replying. A grave but haughty bow of the head, as she drew back to let the visitor pass out, was all with which Miss Rivers would trust herself, and she made no offer of any other civility. Rachel had just reached the door, when, as if with a sudden recollection, she turned, and produced a small white parcel addressed to Mrs. Caddis.

"Might I take the liberty of leaving this with you, ma'am? My sister promised little Miss Caddis some cakes, and her mamma is not at home, I think."

"I will give it to her when she comes in; I thank you," said Leonor, and courtesy gaining the day, she opened the door herself to let the visitor out.

A minute or two afterwards, Mrs. Caddis and Lily came in, the latter full of excitement.

"My cakes! Angélique's cakes!—where are they? Do let me have them now! She has

had no appetite all day, and the doctor is not coming, you know, to make her well."

"Indeed, but he is, Lily," said Miss Rivers, as she handed the parcel to her lodger; "a telegram has just come to say he will be here as usual. I was going up to tell his sisters."

"Oh, that is nice. Mamma, do open that parcel now; please do!"

But Mrs. Caddis would not listen, told her she was getting more and more spoiled, and went upstairs with the parcel, Lily following closely. No peace was allowed, however, till it was opened, and two little packets appeared, one addressed to "Miss Caddis, for her dolly," the other sealed up.

"Has she sent you some too, mamma?"

"Yes, *chérie*, I suppose so. What are yours?"

"Oh, three sponge cakes, sugared over, just as Angélique likes them! What a kind Mrs. Crabtree that is, though she looks so ugly! I must go and show these to Mrs. Delmar. What shall you do with yours, mamma?"

"Put them away for the present. There, run off, and play with your doll, *chérie*. My head aches, and I must lie down a little."

The news that Dr. Mordaunt was coming put everything else out of the heads of the public in general, and Rachel's visit was almost forgotten in the pleasures of preparation. It happened, however, that Mrs. Caddis was in Dora's room a short time before his arrival, and the tender-hearted girl was so dismayed by her paleness, and evident suffering, that one of her first words to her brother was to request him to do something for her.

"I suppose she frets about Paris, and any friends she may have there."

"She may be thankful that she and her children are out of it, Dolly. It makes one quite wretched to think what the women and little ones must be going through. What a Christmas they will have!"

Here a tiny hand slid into his.

"If you please, doctor, Angélique has saved you one of her cakes;" and true enough, there was the tempting dainty wrapped up in paper, and made, with much difficulty, to balance itself on the bandaged arm of his patient. A long explanation touching Mrs. Crabtree and her cocoa-nut cakes did not help him to understand much about it; but he did understand

the child's self-denial and gratitude, and would not have chilled them for the world. So he accepted his fee with many thanks, and put it in his pocket ; knowing that it would become a priceless treasure, if brought out again the next day.

Perhaps Lily would have been disappointed by a refusal ; but something of the spirit of Charles Lamb, when he gave away his grand-mamma's plum cake to the beggar, and repented so bitterly ten minutes afterwards, came over her in the course of the evening. Sponge cakes were very nice, and did not drop in every day, and when you only had three, and shared one with Albert, and gave a whole one to the doctor, you did not get so much for yourself as you would like. And they were so good for Angélique—the doctor said so. What would poor Mrs. Crabtree think if she knew he had had one of them ? Think it quite unkind, perhaps, and very greedy ; but then great big men always were greedy, and had twice of everything. By the way, mamma had some cakes too—they would only spoil by being put away ; what fun it would be to hunt them out ! She would be shocked, of course,



and say, "Oh, *chérie*, you spoiled, naughty thing!" and then she would tell Miss Rivers how clever it was. They would pretend that it was all Angélique's doing; she must have a little fun, and the others would think of nothing but their practising, and it was only grand and dull—no dance music at all. Frank Longley had come to tea, and to have a singing lesson, and his singing was not to Lily's taste; she did not care for the British Grenadiers, nor for Frank himself, particularly as he never paid her any compliments, or wanted to dance with her. No, they were all amusing themselves their own way, so she and Angélique would go theirs; and upstairs she trotted, with her doll in her arms, to her mother's room, where, nominally on her account, a fire was lighted every evening. It burned brightly enough for Lily to carry out her design. First, she peeped among the untidy accumulations on the table, chairs, and drawers; then into the drawers themselves—all in vain. At last she caught sight of a travelling hand-bag, into which Mrs. Caddis was accustomed to thrust anything that she did not exactly know what to do with at the moment; it was locked, but a little

rummaging soon produced the bunch of keys, and Lily's fingers quickly grasped the coveted parcel.

Her early training had not been of a sort to make her scrupulous: to help yourself whenever you had the chance, had always been her mother's practical instruction; on the stage clever people always did it—and at this moment, the cleverness of the discovery was more clear to her mind than the right or the wrong.

“I'll make them all guess what I've found, and mamma will say she cannot hide anything from me, and Albert will say ‘Oh, *chérie!*’ and I shall pop a large bit in his mouth, and kiss him till he laughs again. Rufus shall have some too; I meant to give him some of mine, if the doctor had not been so greedy. I'll wait till they have done that long thing, and then we'll go in and have some real fun.”

She wrapped her small person up in a little plaid shawl, and tripped down the staircase again. The evening was mild for the season; the gas afforded sufficient light, and the rug at the foot of the stairs a soft resting-place close to old Rufus, who, hating music cordially,

always retreated thither when the violoncello came out.

“This is a great secret, Rufus dear, between me and you and Angélique. We have been foraging, like Albert and Archer, and you shall have a big piece, because we can pretend Miss Rivers is gone to Hastings, so we can do as we please.”

The good-tempered dog allowed her to disturb his slumbers without resistance; licked her face and hands before she was aware, and vouchsafed a civil amount of interest in the opening of her paper parcel. But either he was not hungry, or he was too polite to be impatient, for he only watched her with a half sleepy eye, as she took out a small, rather thick biscuit, smelt, broke, and tasted it. It had an odd flavour, though it was sweet, and when she had eaten a small piece, she began to feel generous about giving it away; Rufus should have his promised treat, and she meant to dole it out in very tiny morsels, so as to last the longer, and make it as great a favour as possible; but in the act of breaking it again, the cake slipped through her fingers, falling on his couchant nose. He raised his head, smelt

the morsel, took it in his mouth a moment, and dropped it again on the rug.

“Oh, you rude, wasteful, extravagant bad dog!” she said, stroking his thick coat with her tiny hand. “Now, I call that dreadful behaviour, for nobody can eat it after it has been in your mouth, and it is quite shocking to be so dainty. I shall not offer you another crumb, you may depend upon that. Give it to me, sir, this minute!”

But Rufus took it all for play, and his paw was on the cake directly, and she was not sufficiently sure of her authority to insist. She only hid the other cake—there were but two—in her pocket, and went on whispering in his ear what a very bad, wasteful dog he was; while the music in the tea-room, which had ceased for a few moments, began again, in a brilliant arrangement of popular operatic airs. Her attention was caught, and she listened eagerly; and as she did so, the sound seemed to swell and swell, as if a dozen instruments were at work. What made them play so loud?—she wished they would not; it made her head feel so odd, as if some heavy thing were pressing upon it. Oh! what was the

matter with her? She felt so sick, so cold, so miserable; and she couldn't cry out to them to stop, or to come—she could only hug Rufus round the neck, and bury her face in his coat, to try and deaden the sound. Rufus, who began to think something was wrong, turned his head, and licked her cheek encouragingly. He was ready to do what he could, if she would only explain—but she was getting past that. The music was now an orchestra; the foot-lights were all flaring up, and there was a crowd of people rushing in, and they would push her down, and tread upon her—and there—there was papa's violin leading the others, and he wouldn't look her way, and the drum was beating so loud, close to her ear——

“Papa! papa!”

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT a cry that was! It startled Rufus, who scrambled to his feet with a bark, as if resolved that the proper authorities should look into the matter without more delay. They were not slow in responding. In the midst of their sweetest harmonies, that piteous call had made everybody spring to the door; and the next moment they were all round the poor child, still clinging, in her agony, to the silky coat of Rufus.

“Has she had a fall? Has anybody frightened her?” were the first questions that suggested themselves, and which no one could answer. Something about “papa’s violin” was all that could be understood; but Mrs. Caddis found, when she took her in her arms, that she was shivering all over; and the little

head fell heavily on her shoulder, with a gasping effort to cry.

"She has got a chill, I am afraid," said Leonor.

"She shall go to bed and get warm, won't you, *chérie*? You have been dozing with Rufus, and dreaming till you got frightened. It is all right now, darling, isn't it? How she does shiver, to be sure! Dear, dear! I hope she is not going to have a bad illness—that would be the climax of our misfortunes. Come, *chérie*, mamma will carry you to bed. It was very naughty of you to stay here in the cold."

The half-conscious child murmured something which nobody could understand; and Adrian whispered a few words to Miss Rivers, which sent her flying into the kitchen with orders to Hannah, seconding her so vigorously in carrying them out, that when Mrs. Caddis's bell rang, as it did frantically soon after, the necessary remedies were ready to be taken to her. Meanwhile, Dr. Mordaunt, seeing Dora pale with agitation, ordered everybody back into the sitting-room, and taking Mrs. Delmar aside, asked if Lily had been eating anything un-

wholesome—had any sugar-plums been given her that day? The question was natural, as there had been several remarkable cases before the public of children being made ill by the trash sold as sweets. Mrs. Delmar, however, believed she had had nothing but Mrs. Stoker's sponge cakes—her mother would probably know.

At that moment Hannah put in her head.

"Could I speak with you, doctor, a minute?"

He was with her directly, carefully shutting the door behind him. The good woman's terrified face told its own tale.

"Oh, sir, the poor little dear!—she's that bad, she never can get over it; so sick and so cold, and as if something were pulling her to pieces. And her poor dear mamma of no more use than a babe in arms, and won't mind a word I say, but cry and rock herself. Will you please to go up and see what you can do?"

Adrian need no urging; he was in the sick-room before the words were well out of Hannah's lips. Leonor, coming through the hall a little while afterwards, found Albert standing about, looking the picture of misery.

1

"Oh, Miss Rivers, I always wait upon her when she's ill, and I know she wants me! I cannot bear to hear her scream so, and not go up to help. *Do let me.*"

"My dear boy, the doctor said the fewer we have in the room the better, so you must be patient. Is she often like this?"

"I never saw her so before. Do you think she could have been frightened by anything?"

"There are no tracks in the garden that I can make out by the moonlight," said Frank, who joined them at the moment, bringing with him a cool breath of the outer air. "The ground is so soft, a fellow must have left footmarks; but we shall see better in the morning. I should like to have the peppering of the cad. I dare say it was the same who hoccussed old pussy."

"Longley, is that you?" called the doctor's voice from above.

"Yes, sir."

"I want some one to run to the chemist's with a prescription, and to bring back the medicine. Will you go?"

"All right. Come, Albert; a run will do you good."

"Is Albert there? Come up here, my boy. I want you to do something too."

The prospect of doing something was cheering. Albert flew upstairs, and received a small parcel and note, which he was to give the chemist; and they were both to wait for the answer.

"Your little sister is not in so much pain just now. I am doing all I can for her," was his reply to the boy's eager looks; and the two friends set off, glad to exchange gloomy suspense for action.

"Depend upon it," said Frank, cheerfully, "she has only had a fright, and will soon forget all about it. One of our fellows turned quite green once, from sheer funk, because he swallowed a frog. It took a week to put him straight; he was always looking as if he expected it to jump out of his throat."

"But Lily didn't swallow anything."

"But she may have seen a fellow's face peering in—with crape on, I dare say, and a blunderbuss. That would make any girl screech, you know."

"Then how did he get away?"

"That's what I want to find out. I would

not say so to Miss Rivers, but I dare say he is doubled up in some dark corner all this time; in the coal-hole, I hope, for we shall find him all the quicker."

Under any other circumstances, such a suggestion would have enraptured Albert; but now he only shook his head, and walked thoughtfully on. Two elderly figures met them as they turned into the chemist's; one being Dr. Bright, and the other the white-haired literary gentleman whose acquaintance he had so recently made.

"Why, Longley, what has brought you here? No one ill at home, I *hope*," said Dr. Bright, one of whose private grievances was that the Longleys, as a race, were always aggravatingly well—or never so ill as to require more than their mother could do for them.

"No one at home," said Frank; "it's the little one at Granville House—Caddis's sister."

Mr. Ingleton turned, and listened with most benevolent interest.

"Taken ill quite suddenly this evening; awfully bad at first, but better now. We are come about her medicine."

"Dear me, I am sorry ; can I be of any use?"

"Oh no, thank you ; the doctor is there, and he is looking after her."

Mr. Ingleton said something to his companion, who turned again to the boys.

"Did you say Dr. Mordaunt had come down again?"

"Yes ; we were just rehearsing for the concert, when the little one began to scream. We mustn't stop, Caddis. Good night, sir."

"Good night. Pray tell your mother, Caddis, that she may command me at any time—when—when the able assistance she now has may not be within her reach."

"I'll tell her," said Albert, nodding, "but Lily won't like you so well as Dr. Mordaunt, you know."

Mr. Ingleton coughed, and again made some remark which only his companion heard.

"Yes, yes," he returned, hastily ; "it is the same man, no doubt, and very clever he is, but eccentric, and sometimes rash. That case was a very mysterious one. I thought so at the time, but no one, I suppose, thought Mordaunt responsible. The jury, at least, did not."

"I have heard strong opinions passed upon his conduct, notwithstanding," said Mr. Ingleton ; and again lowering his voice, he communicated a few of them to the doctor's willing ears ; but the boys had by this time entered the shop, and could hear no more. They had nearly half an hour to wait, and were somewhat surprised as they came out, each with a parcel in his hand, to see the white-haired gentleman still standing about alone.

"Humph !" observed Frank, looking over his shoulder, "I hope he is going in to buy liquorice. That cough always sounds as if he did it on purpose."

Miss Rivers met the boys on their return, but though willing to appreciate Frank's zeal in the general service, she could not be brought to see that he would be of immense use if he mounted guard in the hall for the night. She did not intend to go to bed herself, till she was quite satisfied about Lily's state ; and she held that her watchfulness would be sufficient even to awe the burglar in the coal-hole. So Frank reluctantly took leave, and ran home to tell his story, and give

his opinion, causing no small excitement among the imaginative members of his family, who had already imbibed Sylvia's favourite theory, that there was a mystery about Granville House. The startling suggestion of the most romantic of the party—that there might be a secret chamber known only to Miss Rivers, in which somebody was concealed, who had peered out when he ought not—was received with merited applause, and not only served them for discussion all the rest of the evening, but was transferred, in a slightly different form, to the pages of the last new story—just then beginning to flag from want of a thrilling incident.

In the mean while, Dr. Mordaunt, after remaining by his little patient till she had fallen asleep, took Miss Rivers apart for a private conference. He had satisfied himself, as he explained, that there was nothing hurtful in the cakes made by his old acquaintance, Stoker—but none the less was he convinced that the child had tasted something poisonous, and he had questioned her mother closely, as to the probability of her having left any dangerous temptation within her reach ; any

article of the toilet, whose scent might have pleased her fancy. He had spoken in all kindness, but she had resented the inquiry as an insult, putting herself into the greatest excitement, and supposing he took her for an actress, who used paint and cosmetics. Because her poor husband played in a Paris orchestra, that was no reason for implying she belonged to the stage. She was sure her cousin, Mr. Sibthorpe, never intended her to be so treated; and as she would listen to no reasoning, or even apology, he had been reduced to wishing her good night, lest her excitement should end in her waking her child.

"I do not know if she will think better of it to-morrow, but she evidently meant to drive me out of the room just now, and she succeeded. If I am to do no more for my little friend, you must have in some one else, for she will require very careful watching."

"It is a strange business altogether," said Leonor. "I have been examining all our stores, and every saucepan and kettle in the kitchen, and can detect nothing."

"I suppose—excuse the liberty I am taking—I suppose you have some plan in prospect,

in the event of losing your tenure by any accident?"

"Only this: that if we lose this home I must work to get another. I think I would as soon be a National schoolmistress as anything else, provided they allowed my aunt to share my lodgings."

"You have a gallant spirit," he said, with unconscious admiration beaming in his eyes. "I should defy any adversity to shake your courage."

"Oh, do not say that! You little know. On some points I am cowardly. I can hardly bear to see her suffer as she does, whenever the word famine is spoken or read. How should I ever bear to see her actually in want?"

"You never will, I trust. You never shall if I can help it."

"And if I can help it, you shall not be driven to look for other apartments. I am afraid I have begun my business too easily. All lodgers, all boarders, cannot be expected to turn out valuable friends."

"Thank you for allowing us the privilege of such a title. You are too sincere to use words without meaning."

“How can I use any less grateful, considering what you have done for us?”

“If we are friends we shall not talk of gratitude. Friends help each other as a matter of course. Please to remember that in future.”

“Anything else, Dr. Mordaunt?”

“Yes”—his voice dropped, but only to increase in earnestness—“yes; one thing more. Remember, that in doing you the smallest service, I am your debtor for a happiness beyond all I ever hoped for; beyond what I can ever deserve——”

There were sounds of approaching steps, and he broke off suddenly. The avowal had escaped him unawares, for though the thought had been in his mind, more or less, ever since he saw her first, he had told himself that he was in no position to consider his own individual happiness. His sisters must be his one consideration until he was a richer man. But the vision of a home, with Leonor at its head, an elder sister to Dora and Sylvia, and his own lovely and loving wife, had stolen in, through all precautions and defences, and would smile away his sterner prudence in his own despite. And when it crossed his mind that at any

moment this newly-discovered treasure might be thrown upon the world, and be buffeted to and fro in the mere struggle for existence, the impulse to assure her of his loyal devotion could not be restrained. It was too late for him to say to himself that on such short acquaintance he could not hope to have made any impression. Short as it had been, its effect on his own heart was very decided, and her start, her deepened colour, the half smile on her lip—he had noticed them all in that one moment—seemed to imply that, if unexpected, the revelation had not given offence. He even thought—though it might be vain presumption—that she looked glad. But she had not spoken; there had been no time; and she might not even have fathomed the meaning of his words. She might have accepted them as the utterance of such friendship as, come what might, he was resolved should be hers. For the rest he must wait, and not hope more than he could help.

And that meant as much hope as could possibly be gathered from the circumstances.

The house had become still: the watchers, who were unwilling to go to bed, were in their

rooms. Mrs. Caddis had peremptorily declined all offers of assistance, except from Hannah; and when the latter had stocked the sick-room with all the necessary comforts for the night, she too was sent away. The door was bolted, and then, for the first time, the wretched woman ventured to look her fears in the face, and ask herself, "Was it possible? Could she——?" There were her keys, but not where she remembered hiding them. The bunch felt sticky, as her things often did after juvenile handling; still she told herself it was all nonsense, only she would just make sure. She opened the bag, felt cautiously, then hurriedly, then desperately. The parcel was gone! The cold dews stood on her forehead and mouth. Was *this* what Lily had meant, in murmuring something about being naughty? What had she done?

The dressing-room in which Albert slept opened into hers, and the low moan which she could not repress reached his anxious ears. He scrambled out of bed, pulled on some of his clothes, and put his head cautiously in. His mother's ghastly face terrified him so, he could only creep across the room, and put his

arms round her, expecting to see her fall down on the floor.

“Mamma, what is it? *Have you seen anybody?*”

His suspicions had been roused, but were on quite another track.

She looked at him without making any answer.

“Mamma dear—only tell me, that I may know what to do. *Is he here?*”

“Hush!” she whispered, with something of wildness even in her caution. “He only guesses—he cannot know. He is gone to his room for the night, and I’ll take care he does not see anything. I’ll call in another doctor to-morrow. Oh! what was *that?*”

There was a sound outside the bedroom door, and both held their breath unconsciously to listen. It was not a hand on the lock, it was not the step of nurse or physician; there it was again; and both knew it at once. It was the scratching of a dog’s paw.

Why his mother should look so terribly frightened Albert could not imagine. Had it been the growl of a wild beast, he could hardly suppose she would have trembled more violently.

With the hope of reassuring her quickly, he moved to the door, in spite of her convulsive clinging to his shirt-sleeve, and as the lock had been carefully oiled, he opened it without any noise.

"Oh, mother darling, just look here!" She looked with staring, frightened eyes; there sat Rufus, as if in his old retriever days, his tail slowly wagging on the rug, and in his mouth poor forgotten Angélique.

"Hearts are not steel, and steel is bent," and as the mother's trembling hands received the toy, large tears poured down her face. She sank upon her knees, and kissed the silky head, sobbing something which Albert could not understand, nor Rufus either, but which really was as fervent a vow as was ever made in the agony of remorse and fear.

Dogs have the most forgiving natures in the world, and Rufus would have licked her hands quite as kindly, even had he known all they had been pledged to do, and had so nearly done.

CHAPTER X.

"It can't be tried again that way ; the game is too dangerous," said good Mr. Ingleton to his invalid friend, when he was paying her his respects that Sunday afternoon, and of course telling her all the news. "The report has got about, through the boys, that the child had a fright, and I have taken care to repeat it ; but after such a blunder, I cannot recommend 'the mixture as before.' I don't say whose fault it was. We are all mortal and likely to err."

"The child," she said, hoarsely—"will she recover—soon?"

"As they have sent for my excellent but singularly deliberate friend, Dr. Bright, I should doubt her recovery being too rapid."

"Speak plainly, sir, if you please. That

style of yours need not be practised upon me. Why is Bright attending her?"

"Because Mordaunt was telegraphed for, and went off this morning by the first train, I am happy to say."

"Have you seen Dr. Bright, and heard anything?"

"Yes, my excellent friend is disposed to be communicative. He holds to the alarm theory (in which the mother strongly supports him); and is rather pleased than otherwise to contradict Mordaunt's opinion."

"And why should it not have been an alarm, as he supposes?"

"Why not, indeed?—only that Mordaunt sent a bit of your sister's cake to be examined. Yates told me so himself, and we had quite a scientific discussion on the subject of adulterations, and such like. It is astonishing the difficulty chemists have in getting their drugs pure; and as to narcotics—I beg your pardon; I am tiring you. Shall I send up Mrs. Biggs?"

"No. If you see my sister, ask her to come to me. And you may as well begin your arrangements for going back to London. We shall not want you here much longer."

Mr. Ingleton smoothed his hat, and stood looking at her with a strange smile; the peculiar expression in which roused her drooping faculties with an instinctive perception of danger.

"I think, Miss Jowett, that on the whole I had better remain," he said, with his old deferential voice, but with warning, almost menace, in his eye. "I think the business here may be more than you can get through alone, and Mr. Jowett's orders were very positive. I was not to leave you till the secretary came down."

"Very well, sir; when Mr. Gawford comes, he will settle it. Leave me now, if you please. As you said just now, you tire me."

"I am sorry, Miss Jowett, as your strength is so valuable. As Mrs. Trigger observed to me that night, how you could go through what you did, visiting sick people in their own rooms, out of pure charity and love, she could not conceive; but I beg your pardon again for mentioning it. Only one would be grieved that such goodness should lose its reward, just for want of a little pains and trouble."

"Come here," she said.

He moved nearer, and stood opposite her chair.

"Whose pay are you in now?"

He bowed with a smile. "The Society's, as usual."

"I will take you into mine. Do you see this chain? It is gold—the only valuable thing I have. It shall be yours if you are true to me." He bowed again. "Tell me now what you advise—what you think of our affairs generally, and of mine in particular?"

"In general, then, Miss Jowett, it comes to this: how is a certain document, discovered by your cleverness, and Mr. Gawford's, to be used to the best advantage? Hitherto, the plan has been to turn Miss Rivers out of her house, so that they may be driven, by necessity, to buy the secret on any terms. This was Mr. Gawford's plan; I am not sure it is the best, but that is another matter. It suits Mr. Gawford's private views, I suppose; and we have tried it, and have done a certain amount of work accordingly."

"What do you mean by his private views?"

"Are you asking me in confidence?"

"Yes, as my adviser. Are his views distinct from ours?"

"Widely. He has two objects near his heart. Such passions are common to mankind, no doubt; one is—revenge, and the other—love."

There was a pause, during which Rachel's laboured breathing was the only audible sound.

"You are very oracular," she said at last, with an attempt at a smile; "but I think you are mistaken, Wolf. He cares more for money than anything else."

"I do not often make mistakes," was his reply, with that smile which had troubled her before. "He hates Mrs. Delmar as much as he admires the lady he wishes to marry; and if by pressure on the one he can advance a step nearer to the other, he will try it, sooner or later. I am not sanguine as to his success, for he is more clever at making schemes than in carrying them through. I have given you a pledge of my sincerity in telling you this, for when you repeat it to him, you of course dismiss me from your service."

"No, Wolf, no; I shall not repeat it—but I

still think you are wrong. One thing more: you followed me that night, you say?"

"I did."

"What did you find out besides?"

"Now, Miss Jowett, this can do no good. I have no wish but to serve you. Don't oblige me to forget my position."

"Your position? Has a spy any at all?"

"Yes; if he is worth his salt, he has that of private detective. And let me tell you, Miss Jowett, it is not everybody who can fill that berth and reserve to himself the right of exposure. Each of you three—steward, matron, and secretary"—he shook his finger at each word with an air of authority quite new in his official demeanour—"each of you has a secret from one or both of the other two, but not from me. I know you all, and could expose you all, as I have often been tempted to do—and might do now, but for one trifling circumstance, which stands you in good stead."

"You mean, of course, your own despicable character," said Rachel, bitterly.

"Despicable! Yes, it is despicable. I know that, or I should not be here. Do you think I would have been your drudge all these months,

or rather years, if I had dared to earn sixpence under an honest man? With you I could feel at ease, and that was worth more than your fifteen shillings a week; and for every insult you put upon me, I paid myself in my own fashion. If that child had died last night—and such things have happened——”

“*You* gave the drug, remember.”

“For an old, useless cur, I grant you—as Mordaunt wrote his prescription that night, to give a few hours’ sleep. Neither he nor I meant to do more—— You are really ill; shall I call your sister?”

She made an effort to answer, but she had endured too long, and Martha, summoned in haste, found her almost unconscious. She was conveyed to her bed, and Mrs. Bright was soon able to inform all her friends that her husband was attending that interesting matron, who was in a sad state of low fever and depression, unable to rest at night, or to take proper nourishment by day. She did think there ought to be an Act of Parliament to prevent those excellent, worthy people from overdoing their goodness, and working themselves to death.

Her report met with general sympathy, and the kind ladies of Westerton were assiduous in inquiries after Miss Jowett, and in sending little presents of game, jelly, and other delicacies—respecting which there ensued more than one passage-of-arms between Martha and Mrs. Biggs; the former having an inconveniently tenacious memory about the number of wings and legs belonging to a pheasant, and the length of time a mould of jelly ought to last when consumed by spoonfuls. Indeed, as Mrs. Biggs observed in confidence to some of her ladies, that dear blessed creature, Miss Jowett, had a sad trial to bear in the worldly-mindedness of her sister. She had her own self heard Mrs. Stoker go on rating the poor sweet soul, as she lay in her bed; and it was all about not getting enough for her money. Never seemed to think she got enough, didn't Mrs. Stoker; and what was the use of people being next door to saints and angels themselves, if they went about with relations who treated respectable lodging-house keepers as if they was born thieves?

As Mrs. Longley, guardedly, but decidedly, had expressed an unfavourable opinion of the

Friend-in-Need and its matron, of course Mrs. Bright and her friends grew the more interested in both, and the report of Rachel being worried by a hard, worldly-minded sister stirred them up to visit her regularly, and comfort her with sympathy and praise. It became a matter of friendly competition who should go there oftenest, stay longest, and talk most; and among them, they sometimes nearly drove her distracted. What at another time might have been eagerly welcomed, as promising well for the future, was now only a double punishment to the suffering woman, whose nerves and strength had failed her so suddenly, and with such fatal effect. Dr. Bright owned that her case perplexed him, and could not imagine how to give her necessary rest, when she refused, quite hysterically, to take anything like an opiate. He mentioned the fact to his friend Mr. Ingleton, who explained it as originating in the impression left on the poor lady's mind by the sudden death of a man, for whom Dr. Mordaunt had ordered a sleeping draught, which, by some mistake, proved to be too strong, or was given too often—at least, that was the defence; anyhow the man died—

and he could only say, nothing should induce him to let Mordaunt prescribe for any one he cared for. And this story was soon circulated in Westerton, the more easily that Dr. Mordaunt was not there to contradict it.

A telegram had summoned him early on the Sunday morning, and he had departed without another private moment with Leonor, hoping to return, at the latest, on Christmas Eve, to stay his promised fortnight. But fever and death know nothing of times and seasons ; and the doctor's Christmas feast had to be kept in his heart, as best it might—one very early service, such as may, happily, be had in London now, being all his share of church festival, while out of church he got none at all. Hurried notes of affection and -regret went down to his disappointed sisters, followed by a supply of dainties from Piccadilly's treasure-houses ; but what were bonbons, even to Sylvia, in Christmas week, when they were cheated out of Adrian's company ?

Certainly, there was not much of the festival aspect in the house, now that Lily was reduced to a little fretful shadow, so feeble that she had to be carried up and down stairs, and laid

on the sofa wrapped up in shawls, ready to cry if any one spoke loud, or slammed a door, and unable to bear a note of music, even from Albert's violin. When tired of the sofa, as she often was, she would sit on Mrs. Delmar's lap, with her head on her shoulder, listening to stories gently and soothingly told, always with some sweet and holy teaching in them, which acted on the sick brain like an evening breeze after a sultry day. And when she wearied even of this, nothing pleased her so well as to be laid down on the hearthrug with Rufus. The old dog seemed to understand all about it, and that she was not to be disturbed; for he would lie with her arm round his neck without moving a paw, however inconveniently to himself, and even growl at Mrs. Caddis if she offered to take her away.

Nothing, however, that Rufus did was ever found fault with now by Mrs. Caddis. Even a wet paw on her crape passed without comment; and more than once Leonor had detected tears in her eyes, when she saw the child and dog lying together. It went far to make Miss Rivers patient, and tolerant of what would otherwise have excited her ire—the

excessive ill humour of her lodger, who, being really unhappy, nervous, and terrified, showed it, as some people do, by being unreasonably cross. Perhaps the fact that Leonor had a little private source of joy, too new and fresh to be spoken of to any one, had some share in this forbearance; not all the anxiety of that time, heavy as it was, could destroy the wonderful sweetness of that first thrill, which had been given her as much by Adrian's look and tones as by his actual words. Disappointing as was his delayed return, there was not a moment's distrust in her heart. Indeed, she had never sat down to ask herself seriously what would happen next, or how it would all end; she had only ascertained, beyond the power of doubt, that he cared about her—that she had a share in the warm regard she had begun to value so highly; and that was enough for the hour. She could speak hopefully to her aunt, be tenderly watchful over Lily, the mystery of whose illness was often revolved in her mind, but without approaching any solution; and she could bear with Felicia Caddis, and surround Dolly with attentions, which were sometimes but coldly received.

She and Sylvia were, in fact, the real elements of cheerfulness in the house ; for, though groaning and lamenting over what she called their misfortunes—the horrid sick people who kept Adrian in town, the fate of the poor little fairy, and Dolly's lowness of spirits—how could Sylvia be dull, when she was full of business ; now helping Henrietta Longley with the decorations (her help consisting of all the easy, pleasant parts, leaving what was cold and wet and prickly to her friend) ; now going up to tea at Mrs. Longley's, and practising Christmas carols ; now taking a splendid walk with the whole party, telling stories all the way ; besides sundry other varieties provided by the indefatigable kindness of her friends ? How could she be dull under the circumstances ?

But Dora was ; and only Nurse Winifred was in the secret of the reason.

There was nothing strange in any one being sad, even at Christmas time, in the winter of 1870-71. Stranger, indeed, would it have been, had no tender sympathies been at work among us, when the presence of our own peaceful festival contrasted with the vision of

what was passing in the favourite holiday-ground of so many. Vague as were reports, contradictory as were newspaper opinions, on one point there was no hesitation—the supply of food and fuel must be running short ; and even if starvation were averted, hardships and privation of every kind must be prevailing, without the hope of relief. It was a terrible time for the strong, and the wealthy, and the willing, with money in their hands, and their feet burning to run to the rescue, and yet obliged by the rights of nations, by the inexorable rules of civilized war, to wait till the struggle between those desperate wrestlers should be fairly ended, lest interference should only prolong the strife.

Of this we feel pretty sure : could England but have honestly believed that France was right in the quarrel, and suffering in a good cause—ready or unready, she would have struck in on her behalf ; but as it was, there would have been very doubtful chivalry in trying to snatch the skilfully won garland from the victor's hand, steeped though that garland might be in the tears of the helpless and innocent. Every one knew this, and every hand was still ; but the

eyes and the hearts of half Europe were on the stage, where the drama was working itself to a close ; and the days were past when even a conquering host could disregard public opinion, and sully its reputation before such an audience. Stern as was the gripe, there was no waste of sternness ; it held on, but it did not wantonly torture ; and there were those among the best and bravest who would gladly have spared if they could.

The last month of the siege had begun. It was the well-known Paris holiday—the first of the year—the day of *étrennes*, so often alluded to, so graphically described by French writers—so comically rebelled against by journalists, who vie with each other, as it comes round, in relating the exorbitant prices asked and given for the offerings made on the shrine of society and fashion ; the rapacity of youthful receivers, already taught to measure everything by its market value ; the costly civility of all the race of retainers, who, however aggravating at other seasons, are blandly devoted to monsieur on the day of *étrennes* ; even that favourite enemy, the concierge, being suddenly endowed with swiftness, politeness,

and memory. A brighter side of the picture is also given, in the joy of the little hard-worked boy or girl, who on this day may hope for an extra gratuity from good-natured employers, which puts another log of wood in the stove, and another pinch of coffee in the pot, and with the help of a roll or two, and a handful of chestnuts, will make the younger ones uproariously happy over their feast. Christmas boxes and New Year's *étrennes* may be abused in more senses than one, but as a small bonus on scanty earnings, they are to the young workers of the town what the "leasing" is in our rural districts, and for their sakes we should never wish to see them abolished.

For those very particular young ladies of whom we are told, who despise *bonbonnières* that cost a guinea, and will not look at a doll under five, we can only wish that they may, as mildly as may consist with instruction, be taught the lesson that was learned in Paris on that New Year's Day of 1871.

It was growing dusk in the afternoon, when a woman, shabbily but decently dressed, and carrying a bundle in one hand and a pitcher

in the other, slowly climbed the dark staircase of a house in one of the least fashionable quarters of the beleaguered city—climbed, with patient feet, to the garret flight, tenanted by as many separate householders as there were rooms. Emile Souvestre has drawn an exquisite picture of the little world inhabiting those upper storeys of working life—their temptations, their joys, their sympathies, their mutual confidence and help; but he drew it in the days of temporary peace, when small comforts could still be earned by labour, and enjoyed in quiet security. Now the morsel had to be waited for, hour after hour, at the places of distribution, and when at last obtained, was becoming every week scantier and more unwholesome. So many resources of humble industry were stopped, that, but for this meagre provision, hundreds must have starved; as it was, their gallant courage was fully tried by endurance.

The patient figure mounting the stairs with her load might have been taken as a type of the *ouvrière* class, of whom their own countrymen have written so pathetically, contrasting their life of continual hard work and scanty

pay with the comparative freedom, indulgent habits, and exacting claims of the working man. From her youth, almost from her babyhood, she had been earning her daily bread, and nothing more. Saving as the industrious French are by nature, poor Françoise had nothing to save, for it was all she could do to make ends meet; and when, on happy occasions, she had a mouthful to spare, there was always a mouth ready to receive it. Perhaps this was the best savings bank after all, for, precarious as her method of existence might be, it had never failed; she had never been forced to ask the alms she gave, and she had never been bowed down by debt. To be pinched, and cold, and tired, were things to which she was accustomed by long practice; and every little alleviation was a gift of *le bon Dieu*, whose fatherly care it had happily never been in her head to doubt.

She shifted her burdens several times before reaching the uppermost landing, and when she stopped at last, drew her hard hand across her forehead, with the remark that it was capital exercise when wood was scarce. A tap at one of the doors being answered from within,

she entered, dropping a friendly curtsy as she did so, and wishing the inmate the compliments of the season. A hollow laugh was the answer, cut short by a still more hollow cough.

“Come in, come in, angel of the garret, and let us exchange compliments, for it is not every New Year’s Day that people have the chance of being historical. Bismarck not gone yet, Françoise?”

“He is the instrument of the good God, monsieur, and for our sins he is allowed to live. But for our sins, you see, we should have driven him home long ago; but what would you have? We must suffer what is sent us. I am afraid monsieur has been waiting a long time. I could not get home a minute sooner.”

A restless, weary sigh was the only answer, and the occupant of the miserable pallet in one corner of the room, half raising himself on his elbow, eagerly watched the proceedings of his visitor, whose presence there was one of his few most precious comforts. Some trifling acts of good nature, some forgotten words of kindness, bestowed upon her when

he was in better circumstances, were being repaid to him tenfold in his extremity by her gratitude, which could only be at rest when toiling in his service. She opened her bundle, which contained a spare but valuable store of fuel, and began to light the rusty stove with a skilful hand; filled a kettle from her pitcher, and set it on to boil, and then beguiled herself in tidying the apartment a little, pausing every now and then, as the distant roar of cannon was brought nearer by a blast of wind, to shake her head and mutter a word of prayer; but otherwise as calm and self-possessed as if the holiday had been in full force, and the streets below thronged with merry-makers, as in the "piping times of peace."

She rubbed down the table, and spread it with a clean cloth, arranging knives and forks as neatly as she could; and then lighted the lamp, really giving the room an aspect of comfort, which the occupant was not slow to acknowledge.

"You best of creatures," he said—his French was fluent, but the insular accent could not be mistaken—"you talk so easily about your

sins, because you have none to trouble you. I suppose you think it less shame to suffer for your own doings than to be beaten by those of your enemy?"

"No doubt, sir; the shame is in the wrong thing, not in suffering for it."

"Ah! as your poet sang, and as Charlotte Corday quoted—

'Le crime fait la honte, et non pas l'échafaud.'

That is what you mean, too, Françoise?"

"I don't know much about it, sir; I am no scholar—and Charlotte Corday, I have heard say, stabbed a man in his bath; which seems a poor thing to do, though he may have deserved it."

"Well, Françoise, I can only say, if you can manage to get me a bath, you are welcome to try the carving-knife on me afterwards. It would save a world of trouble if more Charlotte Cordays went about, clearing the place of the bad and mischievous; and I have been both."

"Don't say so, monsieur; don't despair. The good God has something in store for you yet, you may depend. You will pull through

this trouble, and go home to madame and your dear children, so clever and so charming. I should like to see that little angel dance once more, that I should."

"I am very glad they are out of this, at any rate," muttered the invalid. "It is bad enough for one's self. How about the larder, Françoise? It would be a satisfaction to see something to eat, if only for the look of the thing."

"Ah, dear monsieur, I have brought nothing in with me but the wood and water. I went to the convent down there," with a jerk of her head, "to see if they would let me have a pinch of coffee for monsieur; and the Sisters told me they had not a spoonful left. I tried several of my old *pratiques'* houses; but some are shut up, and the rest could spare nothing—only promised double *étrennes* next year. *Le bon Dieu* only knows where we shall all be by that time—with Him, I hope, if things go on as they do now."

"Any news this evening? What are the troops about?"

"I cannot say, sir; they talk of a night sortie, but I know too little about such things

to be sure. There were crowds of young fellows standing about with muskets, but I could not find out that they meant to do much with them. The enemy dare not meet us face to face, you see, sir, till he has starved us down a bit first. Ah! now the water boils kindly, and the stove is humming away. If only that dear young man would come in with some meat; he never fails us when he sets himself to work in earnest."

"There he is on the stairs, then. I hear him whistling, so he must have foraged well. Come in, Archer, and wish us a happy New Year. Here is Françoise waiting for her *étrennes*, and ready to give warning if we are not liberal."

"She shall have them," was the reply, as a fair-haired, bearded, blue-eyed Englishman strode in, with an old corded box in one hand, and a basket in the other. "Oh, come, you have got fire and lamp ready—that is first-rate; and here is your joint. I had to wait a pretty long time before I got it,"—producing some scraps of meat and bone, which Françoise eagerly examined, and set about preparing to cook. "The sirloins are

in such request at this time of the year, that your fashionable butcher hopes you will excuse his sending you another cut. I say, *Françoise*, don't you look too close; some objects of nature, like some works of art, are meant to be seen at a certain distance."

"What is the last news, Archer?" asked the invalid, as his friend took his bony, feverish hand in his.

"Well, they say Jules Favre is going to Versailles to make terms, and some think there will be a grand sortie first;—they can't go on very much longer at this fun; but, by the look of some of them, it seems almost a pity it should end without a fight, if only to let off their steam. You won't get those fellows, who have been drawing thirty sous a day for acting soldiers, to lay down their muskets directly the want of them is over, and go back to the counter and workshop. They have found out that they are strong enough for mischief, at any rate, and the temptation will be a lively one, unless Bismarck has them all disarmed. Time will show: meanwhile, we must take care of the British lion. Has he a growl left in him to-day?"

"Scarcely. You'll wonder when I tell you that, lying here, I have had more music in my head—ay, and of finer quality, than at any time in the last twenty years. There has been a roll of instruments in my ears, rising and falling like a wave of the sea—sometimes soft and plaintive, sometimes full and grand; and above all, a march, in which I could not make out what was the dominant expression—courage or despair. And I tried to note some of it down, but my hand shook too much, and I could not see. It would be the making of us, Archer, if I could but do it. There!"—as the distant boom reached them again; and Françoise, busy over her stewpan, looked up and crossed herself, with a murmured prayer. "They are tuning the orchestra again, and the piece will soon begin. And when they call for the composer, Archer, you must take Albert to the front with you, and just explain why I can't show."

"All right, Mr. Caddis," said his friend, after a serious glance at the altered features. "I have not shown you your *étrennes* yet. I have got a drop of cognac for you."

He produced a little flask from his breast

pocket, and poured a small quantity into a glass, which he held to the musician's lips. The stimulant seemed to restore him for the moment; there was a more natural light in his eye, and his voice was steadier as he thanked his friend.

"Try it yourself, Archer; you want it as badly as I do."

"Not I; this is medicine for the sick, not oblivion for the healthy. I have something here besides that you will like to see. Lend a hand, Françoise, just a minute. Thanks. See here; a poor fellow is dead whom I have been visiting every day, and his last request was that I would accept this box, and do what I pleased with the contents. I don't quite know what they are, but I know there is a dressing-gown, which is just what you want to sit up in; and, Françoise, there is a silk handkerchief or two for you, and there is some linen, new and old, and we must share it with our neighbours. No one thinks about private property in shipwreck or siege."

"*Le bon Dieu* will pay it all back to you in Paradise, monsieur," said Françoise, smiling with pleasure, as one article after another was

produced, and its destination decided upon. "This for Mr. Caddis, and that for Françoise; and this old jacket for Henri, our lame workman in the next room, and these stockings for the old woman down below; and these old shirts must go to the hospital, as they are crying out for more linen. A little of all sorts there seems to be here. I suppose when the family went away, they gave him their odds and ends, poor fellow, little thinking to whom they would come so soon."

"He was a servant, sir?"

"Yes; and his mistress took fright before the siege, and went away, leaving him to take care of her apartments. He met with an accident, which at last caused his death, but he would not be taken to the hospital, and really died at his post like a soldier. Holloa! What have we got here?"

It was a case of polished wood, and felt heavy; it was locked, too, but the key lay near it, tied with black ribbon.

"It feels like a liqueur-case," said the young man; and, true enough, on opening it he discovered four small square bottles, full of choice curaçoa.

He looked up and met the eyes of the good woman, fixed upon him with a mild, wistful expression, that brought the blood for an instant into his haggard cheeks.

"The tempter never sleeps," he said, with a bitter smile, "but who would have dreamed of his hiding behind the pillow of poor dead George?"

"Ah! sir, he can hide behind the altar, if necessary. You will not let him make his *étrennes* out of you, sir, will you—and rob you of all the prayers you have earned during these hard days?"

"If prayers could serve me, Françoise, I need not have seen these days at all. There is one, if still living, who did all that woman could in that way—and you see the result."

"Ah! sir, if your mother ever prayed for you at all, depend upon it she is praying still; and a mother's prayers are never lost, when they are put up to Him who loved His own so dearly. And you'll excuse my boldness, sir, if I do say that I have seen that in you which makes me hope and believe she will have her answer yet—in this world or the next."

The Englishman made no reply, and she seemed to expect none, for she had returned to her cookery even while speaking. There was silence for some time. The invalid, tired with the unusual excitement, dropped off into an uneasy doze, and his comrade had sufficient experience among the sick to see he must not be lightly disturbed. He sat down on one of the rickety wooden chairs, and resting his elbow on his knee, and his chin on his hand, watched Françoise at her useful employment, but without heeding or even seeing her. His thoughts were wandering, as they often did, and had done much more than usual during these weeks of constant privation and self-denial.

Adrian Mordaunt had rightly judged. It was, perhaps, the one period in which the fallen gentleman, ruined by his own fatal habits, could visit Paris with a chance of regaining something of what he had lost. When all around him were scenes of distress and suffering; when the hospital required all the help that man or woman could offer; when every drop of wine or brandy was life to some one among the many he longed to succour; how could a

man indulge, even for an hour? The victory had been half won among the ambulances of France—it was completed within the walls of her capital; and what might have been the work of years elsewhere was accomplished under the pressure of circumstances in a few weeks. During these weeks, his life had been one incessant self-abnegation; he gave up rest, food, drink, for the sick and wounded, and was known by sight, and under a variety of names, in places of which British tourists in general never hear at all.

But it is not to be supposed that this was done easily, or without suffering.

At this very moment, the consciousness that those bottles were there, within his reach, and that one stretch of his arm would bring the draught to his lips, securing him forgetfulness of the past, delusion about the present, and indifference about what was to come, made him shiver all over, as with a weird and unholy fascination. His brain was weak with fasting and fatigue, and the craving became absolute pain. He felt as if the room were giving way with him, and a hand seemed pointing to the liqueur-case, as the only chance of safety. A

low groan caught the ear of Françoise; she looked round, saw his face, and at once came to the rescue. He found her standing over him, as she had stood over his friend, with a cup of broth—poor and weak, it must be owned, but still with some flavour and scent of food—which she put to his lips, and had the pleasure of seeing him swallow as if it had been, as he said, a *potage* from *Les Trois Frères*.

“God bless you, my dear woman! You have saved my life;—no, that is worth nothing in these days; you have saved my reason. The devil was at my elbow that minute, and if he had won me then, it would have been for ever. I could almost think you must be my good angel in disguise—only he must have given me up long ago.”

“There is an angel with us, monsieur, but not in the form of a poor sinful woman. He is busy all over our sorrowful town, but he has business up here too, and every day his step sounds plainer, and his shadow grows deeper. M. le Professeur will never lead his orchestra again.”

“I fear not; he is very much altered.”

“Ah, monsieur, that he is; and he is so

much gentler, and so patient. I think, sometimes, that the beautiful music he has in his head gets into his heart, now he is weak and ill, and leaves no room for the bad thoughts and words. There, he is waking up; if monsieur will give an eye to the *casseroles* just for a minute, I'll step down to *la mère* Philippine with the stockings, and see what she can let us have to flavour the ragout. I have some of your money left."

"And look here, Françoise; take this flask of curaçou with you, and leave it at the convent. They have a lot of old people there now to whom it will be a treat. I would take it myself, but they would think me intrusive."

"You, sir —after helping them as you did the day there was that disturbance in the street? The good Sisters burn a taper for you once a week, and remember you in their office every day. It is all being reckoned to your account, monsieur."

"It had need, Françoise, for there is a long score the other side. Ay," he muttered, when she was gone, "if there were any power in the prayers of saints, I might have looked for a miracle before now; but saint and angel

both must be against me by this time. What is it, sir ?"—for the sick man had roused himself suddenly. "Dinner will soon be ready ; siege time is not the best for punctuality."

"Archer, my dear fellow, come here. Have you pen and paper—pencil—anything, to jot down the notes ? I have it all now : my Symphony of Life and Death—it is coming upon me like a great flood ; it will be the wonder of the age when finished. Give me the pen ;—steady my hand a minute, and I'll show you the leading idea—the movement that runs through it all—the march of the men that are going to die——"

"Ah, the Ave Cæsar ! We may all sing that now, I think."

"We sing it all our lives long—but to what a Cæsar ! Hold my hand tighter, dear fellow—you will make it out, I know, from those blotches ; and when I am gone, you will work it up, and bring it out, and teach it to my boy. 'Ave, Cæsar ! morituri te salutant !' The song of the swordsmen who know there is nothing but death before them, and yet fight to the last. Cannot you hear it—swelling and dying away among the old brick arches, tier above tier,

with the blue Roman sky overhead, and the roar of the multitude hemming them in? Is not that a type of life as we see it?—and does not the music paint it all, even to the landscape and the distant hills? Try it on my violin, that I may hear it just for once.”

The younger artist sighed, but complied at once, without any other evidence of exhaustion. He brought the lamp closer, and endeavoured to decipher the scrawl before him; it was a difficult task, and the composer grew painfully excited at his hesitation.

“Lend it to me; I can do it,” he said, with feverish impatience. “Tell Albert that he must make it the aim of his life to do me justice—I have never had it yet; my fame is in his hands. Listen!”

And he drew the bow across the strings with some of his old fire and strength. “This opening movement is the very soul of the piece; it is its life, through all the death pangs that follow; give it like this.”

He played six chords of equally sustained power; then the instrument dropped on the soiled coverlet, his head fell back on the pillow, and his hand lay nerveless in that of his friend.

“Françoise, be quick !” cried the latter, as she pushed the door open, and appeared with full hands. Setting down her load with anxious care, she ran to the bed.

“He is faint, he wants food ; you should not have permitted music before dinner, monsieur, Hold him up, while I feed him. Yes ;—a few drops of brandy will do no harm. The dear man—he never did much work when he was fit for it, and he has a *fureur de besogne* now it is too late. We are all apt to be like that. Courage, sir ! you will be better soon. That’s right ; get the soup down his throat, and the music will run the smoother ; and we’ll all dance to it as soon as he gets well.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE warm food and stimulant again restored, to a certain extent, the waning strength ; and when the invalid had once more composed himself to rest, the other two lost no more time in appeasing their own hunger. Nothing would induce Françoise to sit at table with monsieur, but she drew her stool close to the stove, and took her portion out of a wooden bowl resting on her knees. Famished as they both were, by a simultaneous impulse they halted in mid-course, and looked at each other.

“How about our neighbours, Françoise ?”

“I was just thinking of them, sir. I am sure poor Henri has not been able to stir out to-day, and I am afraid no one has been near him, so he will have had nothing ; and the old lady next him, she looked very feeble this

morning, and her son is on duty. He will draw his pay, and get his rations, but she will have a long time to wait for her share. Suppose I go and see—ah! what is the meaning of this? I don't seem to be able——”

She had only time to place her bowl on the floor, and let herself slip down by it.

“I don't know what has come to me, sir, all in a minute, but I can't see.”

“Drink this,” said the Englishman, giving her a *petit verre* out of the liqueur flask; “you are over-tired, my brave heart, and must rest a bit. You stay here and watch monsieur; I will go round and look after the neighbours.”

He took the flask and a glass, and went quietly out, leaving poor Françoise with her head on the wooden stool before the stove. She was asleep before he had crossed the threshold.

It was not the first time by many that the wanderer had visited the other dwellers of the garret storey. To one of them in particular—the young instrument-maker, laid up by an accident which the want of proper comforts was fast converting into a serious case—the sight of the blue eyes, and the touch of the small, well-shaped hand, so delicate and yet

so firm, had become a precious luxury, rejoiced over when present, and longed for, through every weary interval, to an extent of which their possessor was little aware.

Poor Henri! He was crouching disconsolately enough over a handful of charcoal in a pan when the door opened, and he uttered a cry of joy at the sight of his friend.

"I knew you would not let the day pass without a *bon-jour*, monsieur; and yet it has been the longest I ever knew."

"The longest day comes to an end at last. Here, comrade, I have brought you your *étrennes*—a drop of fine curaçoa. I dare say you will find a health to do it honour."

The young workman held his hand in his own, and gazed at him with wistful affection.

"If I knew who it was that loved you best, I would drink hers. There! I will do it, at any rate;" and he emptied the glass with a smile that met no response from his visitor's lips.

"Thanks, friend," the latter returned, but with a sadness he could not conceal. "You are more worthy to drink to her than I. You never broke her heart."

His humble friend looked up almost indignantly.

"I would not have believed any one who said such a thing of you. I don't believe a word of it. You never wronged any woman that loved you; it is not in your heart."

"Not in my heart, Heaven knows, Henri. I would sooner have died; but I did it."

"And she—is she dead now?"

"I don't know. It is ten years since I left her."

"Ten years! Why, that is a lifetime. She may have forgotten all about you, long ago."

"Mothers do not forget so soon. Time goes for nothing with them."

"With mothers, certainly. I beg pardon, I mistook. *Passe pour les mères; ça vous reste toujours; vrai!* Mine is a long way off, but she thinks of me as she roasts her chestnuts to-night—that I know as well as if I saw her. The cider jug will go round to my health, if those rascals have not got hold of everything yet. I wish I was by her chimney fire at this moment, and you with me, dear sir. It is cold here, bitterly cold; and our hands will be too stiff to hold the tools."



“They will, so I am going to carry you to the Professor’s room. His stove is alight, and we can divide the heat, if we cannot the fuel. I can get you in, chair and all.”

Henri remonstrated, but the other paid no heed, and with some little difficulty accomplished his purpose. Françoise woke up at their entrance, and was ready to assist in a moment; reviving the stove, and placing the seat out of the immediate draught of the door. The young workman was profuse in his thanks. In contrast with the one he had left, the room appeared luxurious; and the bowl of soup and crust of coarse bread were all the more welcome for the light and warmth, and the kindly faces.

“Ah!” he said, when his meal was finished, “this is cheering; this gives one some heart to pull along. I’ve been listening all day to those poor little ones down below till I could have cried with them. I am afraid they are worse off than we are.”

“The father went out yesterday morning, and is not come back yet,” said Françoise. “I would have gone to see if I could help them, but they are ladies, and might think me imper-

tenant. Two of them are English; I know that will interest you, monsieur."

"Do they want any help that I can give them?"

"I really cannot say, sir; but there they are—an old lady and two young ones, and five children. Their *bonne* left them a week ago, and they have had everything to do for themselves. The father has carried up the water, and fetched the wood when they could get any—yes, and the allowance of meat; and if no one has been to secure that, they will be sadly short of provisions."

"I had better go down and knock at the door, and offer my services," said the Englishman, though with more hesitation than when he had proposed to visit Henri.

"Do, sir; it will be very kind. But—excuse me—if you would just let me brush your coat and boots while you are washing your hands, the ladies would see it was all right, and that they could trust themselves to an English gentleman."

He followed her advice, and even stopped to glance at his own worn features in a dim, cracked mirror, hanging in one corner of the room.



“My country may be proud of such a representative,” he said in his own language, as he hastily arranged his disordered locks and soiled dress ; “but, luckily, there is not much chance of any one being here who could possibly know me again.”

He went down the dark staircase to the next floor, and knocked with faltering hand at the door, through which the wailing of childish malcontents was still to be heard. It was hastily opened by a young girl of lady-like appearance, and with pleasing features, though at that moment they wore the too general aspect of fatigue, anxiety, and privation.

“What is it, sir ?” she asked in French. “Have you come with news ?”

Another lady was by her side in an instant, with a child in her arms, looking ready to sink upon the floor as she waited for his answer. He hastened to explain that he was a stranger, and only presumed to offer his assistance, fearing that English ladies might be in some difficulty in the present trying state of affairs.

They looked at him and at each other ; and the younger lady, meeting his eyes, and reading there the integrity of his purpose, thanked

him with the gratitude she felt, owning that they were in the greatest distress and perplexity. Her brother-in-law, M. Florian, had left them to join his comrades on duty, and they had heard nothing of him for nearly two days;—their fuel and food were nearly exhausted; and his mother, being infirm, required constant care, as well as the children, one of whom was an infant.

The case was simple enough, and only too common at that time, and there could be no more hesitation about accepting menial services from others than on a desert island; so they were only too thankful for the willing pair of arms that at once went to work in their cause, carrying up, first, a couple of pails of water as handily as if he had been a native of Auvergne, and then, with an immense amount of diplomacy, arranging terms of barter with a better provided neighbour below, who consented to part with a basket of wood, some eggs, and a loaf, in exchange for one of the precious flasks of curaçoa. Laden with these treasures, he returned to Madame Florian's apartment, and entreating permission to deal with the stove, soon set it alight. The children

gathered round him, making friends at once, and the ladies lost no time in turning their supplies to the best account. They had still a little flour, and a private store of tea ; and when they pressed him to partake of their meal, he owned, with a smile, that if they could spare a cup for an invalid countryman upstairs, he should be grateful. So then he had to wait while the water boiled, and meanwhile made himself so useful, and they were all so busy, that it seemed quite natural to talk of their circumstances—and it soon came out that the younger sister had joined the married one the year before, in hopes of supporting herself as a teacher of music ; that M. Florian was employed in a government *bureau*, but had lost his situation in the general collapse, and they had been struggling on upon his savings, and the sale of most of their little property, hoping for better times ; that Auguste was very kind and good, and worked like a servant for them all, and would not permit either of them to go and wait for the allowance of meat, when Toinette left them, but went himself. No one else could pacify his poor mother, who was always expecting a shell to fall on the

house, or a troop of Prussians to rush in and put them all to the sword. An explanation was presently shouted in her ears by her daughter-in-law, to the effect that an English gentleman had called, who assured them the streets were quiet, and the firing was from the forts—he would let them know in a minute if there were any cause for alarm; to all which the good lady listened, with shaking, uplifted hands, and some polite ejaculations of gratitude, mingled with others expressing general distrust of everybody who was not the absent Auguste. For the latter she persisted in asking, till her attention was happily distracted by her long-delayed meal—a cup of tea and an omelette. Over this, she seemed to recover her good humour, and begged the gentleman so urgently to come and visit them as often as he could, that he had no choice as to consenting. Indeed, it appeared as if he hardly knew how to leave them; for one topic led to another, and after all the events of the day had been discussed, the ladies went on to talk of England—dear England!—and their chance of seeing her again—and then of their old home in the pretty village of Buckhurst, where their father

was curate for so many years, with the prospect of succeeding to the living ; as he would have done, only by an unfortunate lawsuit the property changed hands, and the reversion was sold by the new patron.

“ You know Buckhurst, do you ? ” asked the younger lady, detecting a startled look and a sudden embarrassment of manner. He did not deny it, but observed he had not been there for many years.

“ Do you remember the name of Kane ? ”

Yes, he replied, he did ; and something in his look, in his gesture, she could hardly tell what, had an electrical effect on Madame Florian.

“ I beg your pardon if I am impertinent, or if I am under an error,” she said, “ but I could almost be certain that you are a Delmar. Am I right ? ”

He stood perfectly still, looking at her, with a strange fire in his beautiful eyes—the fire that burns in the anguish that cannot weep. There was an evident struggle in his mind, for his impulse was to turn and leave them without an answer ; but to him, too, had come a mysterious influence in the voices, the

language, the unexpected association of ideas, overcoming pride and shame before he was aware.

“You are the first person, for ten years, to whom I have acknowledged the name,” he said, hoarsely, “but it matters little here who knows it; and I would not sit down with you on false pretences. My name is Hastings Delmar—your father christened me in Buckhurst Church.”

They each seized a hand, with a warmth of welcome that defied all reserve.

“Then it was your father who was so shamefully robbed of his estate. And your noble, generous mother—is she living?”

“You do not know my story, then? I thought it was known to all the world—or at least, to all who knew our name. You may form your own conclusions; for ten years I have allowed every one to believe me dead, as the greatest kindness I could show them. I have never betrayed my existence before, only you took me by surprise, and somehow——”

He could not finish the sentence: he turned to the door, and was gone in a moment.

But Madame Florian had seen the anguish in his face, and she flew after him with a sudden pang of dread. She found him sitting on the stairs, trembling all over, and so agitated he could hardly breathe; but she did not know, as he did, that he was at that instant on the brink of the worst danger he had ever met. The demon whisper was burning in his soul and brain—"It is no use looking back at your past position—you cannot regain it—it is all over with you as a gentleman; run upstairs and get that bottle of strong liquor which is left—there is enough to give you complete forgetfulness for to-night, and to cut you off from these people at once and for ever. Drink and forget—that is all that is left for you now!"

Would he have yielded, as—to his sorrow and loss—he had yielded before? We cannot tell; but the better angel, who had been prevailing with him so powerfully during these last weeks of privation, was not wanting now, and saved him by the touch of a woman's hand. Laying hers timidly, but kindly, on his shoulder, Madame Florian entreated him to look up, and say he forgave her; and when he raised his

eyes, he saw that the large tears were running from hers. He pressed her hand to his lips, and she felt his own tears fall heavily upon it—the first he had shed for many a day.

“You forgive us, Mr. Delmar, and you will come in with me as a favour, and just take one cup of tea with us before you carry some up to your friend? Thank you,” as he rose to obey. “I should never have held up my head again if you had refused me. Oh, sir! your parents were so good to ours—if you would only allow us to look upon you as a friend, it would be helping us to bear a load of gratitude which we shall have to carry for life, and which we can do nothing to lighten! Olive”—her sister was standing at the door in eager anxiety—“we have found a friend, and we will keep him; and when he finds we deserve his confidence, he will give it to us. Meanwhile, we will give him some tea. Children, take care of our visitor—he comes from my dear old home in England.”

The welcome was so cordially given, the wanderer resisted no longer; a spell was upon him, as if the sweet legend of modern genius had been realised, and the Spirit of the past

had power to make the present as if it were not, and the future as it yet might be. Home and parents were near him once more, and their voices wooed him back without a word of reproach that was not more tender than caresses.

The tact of his new friends repressed their curiosity ; not a question was asked about his position—their talk was partly of their childish recollections, partly of their present predicament and anxiety—but every moment seemed to take something away from the restraint they had all felt at first ; and Olive Kane, being less preoccupied than her sister, was the more ready to communicate her own experience and opinions, revealing an amount of cheerful patience, and energy under difficulties, that touched the listener on his most accessible point. He admired the brave girl, who on her father's death had so gallantly struggled to earn independence, and had actually done it for some months, until the war dispersed her connection. They talked of music with a genial interest in the topic, which for the moment banished all others ; and Hastings Delmar—we give him now his rightful name—spoke of his dying colleague upstairs, and the long medi-

tated symphony, on which his brain was working while his hand was powerless.

"If he had only worked at it sooner, he might have left a name behind him after all; now, I fear it will never be written; and there is a grandeur in the outline, and in some of the fragments, that exceeds anything he ever did yet."

"Is there no chance of his recovery?" asked Olive; "can we do nothing? English people are all brothers and sisters in Paris now, you know."

"I thank you for the word; I shall hold you to it, Miss Kane," said he, rising. "When you want your brother, my kind sisters, you have only to bid him come."

"At any rate, we shall expect him to bring back our jug," said Olive, who had just filled it with tea, "for crockery is very scarce, and we cannot buy any more."

"You shall have it to-morrow morning," was his reply; and after a formal leave-taking of the old lady—promising to let her know the instant he heard the Prussian bugles, that she might be ready in time—he returned to the upper storey.

CHAPTER XII.

"I AM glad you are come back, sir! We think M. le Professeur very much changed within the last half-hour," said Françoise.

The young workman was sitting by the bed, pen and paper in hand, with which he had endeavoured to transcribe what the invalid dictated. He, too, seemed much relieved by Delmar's entrance.

"He is full of something he wants taken down," he said, "and half his talk is in English, and I cannot follow him. I am sure he is feverish, and ought not to talk at all, but he will."

"This will do him good. Look here, Mr. Cuddis, I have got a treat for you. Some English ladies below have sent you a jug of tea."

He poured some into a cup, and gave it to the sick man, who drank, though with difficulty, and looked at him with a half-bewildered expression in his hollow eyes.

“Is my wife there, Archer? I fancied—ah, yes, I remember it all now. Don’t think she was to blame. I told her to get away while she could, because of the children. I am glad she did—poor dears, what would have become of them all this time? I say, Archer, I have a great deal to say to you. I must settle something, you know.”

“Whenever you like, sir; but suppose you go to sleep now, and talk to-morrow?”

“To-morrow may never come to me. The grand old march is in my ears, and I am being drawn into it. Archer, my dear fellow, I have wasted my life awfully—don’t you go and do the same. You have the stuff in you, and you ought to turn out something good—you, and my boy. That is what I wanted to speak about. I want you to be Albert’s guardian, do you hear? And, Archer, as soon as you can get out of this trap, I ask you, as my only friend, to go to England and see my wife. You’ll find her, I think, at her aunt’s, Miss

Sibthorpe, of Westerton; she meant to go there, and ask to be taken in. If you see the old lady, ask her to forgive me my share in the offence. I have written to my wife; you will find the letter in my pocket-book. I have told her what I wish. I know you'll do all this for me—won't you, old fellow?"

The good angel was still prevailing, and, though it was with a painful effort, the promise was given. It relieved the sick man's mind, and he dozed for some little time, waking up at intervals to drink a little of Madame Florian's tea, which was kept warm on the stove. From one of these dozes he was startled by the roll of drums in the street, as a detachment went by on their way to their quarters, and it seemed to have a strong effect on his brain. He sat up in bed, and grasped the bow of his violin, as if about to lead an orchestra.

"That is the key-note, as it were, of the whole movement, gentlemen—it all hangs upon that—the march to death; recognised, not feared, by those who form part of it, through all the changes of life, represented, as you perceive, by the music—the joy bells, the

marriage chorus, the dance, the hunter's bugle, the solemn chant, the national procession, the wail of parting, the pæan of victory,—through all and each, blending with, yet antagonistic to their harmony, goes on this primary theme, the march of the swordsmen to the circus, where crowds look on to see them die ;—the great 'AVE CÆSAR' of human fate. Dynasties fall, emperors are murdered, and their places filled—but 'bread and the games' are still the people's cry, and the gladiator must still be ready, and he must neither flinch nor fail. There is always a Cæsar to salute, and a Rome to see him die. You will take the movement as I give it you, gentlemen, thus—— ”

The boom of the distant cannon broke in here, with an effect that thrilled the listeners. It seemed, however, to calm the fevered brain, for the uplifted arm dropped on the quilt, and in an altered voice he murmured, “ Tell Albert to take care of his mother and Lily—poor little Lily ! . . Archer, my dear boy . . . are you there ? ”

“ Yes, sir ; close to you.”

“ Promise me you will go to them as soon as this is over.”

"I will, sir."

"And, Archer . . . be steady, there's a good fellow, and leave off bad habits; you're young enough to do it, and that boy will take after you, remember."

"I will try, sir."

The answer was given steadily, but with a sadness that was not without humility.

"That's right. Who are in the room with us?—I can't see."

"Our faithful friend, Françoise, who works for us all—and the clever fellow who mended your violin so well, you told me."

"Ah! I am in debt to them both; you'll see to that, Archer?"

"I'll pay it all, sir, if I live."

"You are a good fellow, and I always said you were a gentleman, though you never would trust me; and you were right, I dare say—I was not to be trusted. I had as fair a chance as any man, and I muddled it away, and this is the end of it all. I say, Archer, do you remember that selection from Handel we played that year we were at Rouen? I have had one of the melodies haunting me all day; even my symphony seemed full of it some-

times, till I could have fancied it was my own. It was in the march, over and over again. Play it to me, will you ? ”

“ Which is it you mean, sir ? ”

There was no answer, but the lifted finger made a few emphatic signs, which Hastings believed he understood. The change in the features had become more visible ; the younger man’s hand trembled a little as he drew the bow across the strings—

“ I know that my Redeemer liveth.”

The cannon boomed on, and again came the roll of the drum and the tramp of soldiers’ feet ; but the violin continued its sweet and solemn strain, and the young workman, leaning his elbow on the table, with his eyes fixed on his friend, listened with eagerness to what was to him a new revelation. His well-trained ear drank in the harmony, and his heart recognised the appeal to its better nature ; it reminded him of the reverence of his peasant childhood, when he worshipped by his mother’s side. Françoise, as she knitted under the lamp, nodded her head occasionally in token of pleasure and approval. She knew nothing at

all about music, and had never heard Handel's name—probably would not have recognised the words of Job, had they been said or sung ; but she felt, as she said, that it meant something good and holy, and made her feel as if an angel of *le bon Dieu* were near.

He was, and nearer than they thought. The sick man had lain quietly for some little time, and they had begun to think he would drop off to sleep ; but he grew more restless, and his friend laid aside the violin to raise him in his arms. Thinking he looked faint, he was about to ask Françoise for the brandy, but Caddis stopped him by an effort to speak.

“Archer, my dear fellow !”

“Here I am, sir.”

“What was that you were playing ?”

“The movement you asked for—‘I know that my Redeemer liveth.’”

“Yes, yes, that's it ; that is what I could not remember, and it seemed to be everywhere. I know, I know. Archer, is it *true* ? Do people *know* it ?”

“They are happiest who do,” was the answer, given from the depth of a troubled heart.

“*Know* it, and yet go on as we all do? Archer—do you believe it is all true?”

“I was taught so, sir. I am sure it is.”

“Archer.” The name was hardly audible. Hastings looked quickly round; Françoise put a spoon into his hand, containing brandy, and with some difficulty he poured a few drops into his friend’s mouth. The lips moved again, and as Delmar bent his ear to listen, he caught the words, “Make Albert know it . . . will you?”

“God helping me, I will; and God only knows how. Ah! more brandy—quick! he is trying to say something more.”

But what that was no mortal ever knew.

The days passed slowly by, and the English sisters, like many other innocent victims of the mistakes of others, struggled on bravely, uncomplainingly, but with every variety of privation and inconvenience. The absence of M. Florian had been only too well accounted for; a bungling volunteer had lodged a shot in his shoulder, and he was laid up in hospital, attended by his wife, whenever she could leave her infant, and by Hastings Delmar, as often as he was not at work elsewhere. To the

latter, it was an indescribable boon that he had this family to think for, now that he was isolated in Paris. He had seen poor Caddis buried, and had locked up his few possessions—their value was not enough to tempt anybody—and he continued to occupy the garret, which Françoise looked after, and kept clean and tidy, as if she had been his servant. But he was not much there, for a welcome always awaited him below, a welcome richly deserved, it must be confessed, by the devotion he showed in his countrywomen's service, not only as hewer of wood and drawer of water, but in doing the worst work of all—fetching the supplies, that had to be so long waited for, and were becoming more and more stinted. Nothing in the nature of work came amiss to him, whether dressing wounds in the casualty wards, or cleaning boots and shoes for the ladies and children; cooking, chopping wood, or carrying burdens. He was only cheerful when fully employed; directly he sat down to rest, the sadness that gnawed his heart-strings showed itself in his face, and the more Olive noticed this, the warmer grew her sympathy. Not daring to ask questions, or probe the

hidden wound, she could only display her kindly feelings by gesture and manner, and the profoundest wisdom would not have taught her more. It was the comfort he most wanted, and he was learning to watch for the bright welcome, and the pleasant words of grateful confidence, as eagerly as the poor children did for his entry with basket or pail, as the case might be.

“What we should have done without you, Mr. Delmar, I cannot imagine,” was her frequent remark ; and it certainly did seem to them all as if he had dropped from the clouds, or the garret, to be their help in the hour of need, for no servant would have worked as he did, with only thanks for his reward. Old Madame Florian, to whom he paid the most chivalrous attention, looked upon him as a Paladin—a second Astolpho of England, in whose company she was safe even from Bismarck. The cannon and the drums were no longer to be shrieked at, while the arm of the blue-eyed Briton was vowed in her defence ; and as he never wished her good night without gravely reporting that all was safe, she went to sleep in contented reliance on his word, instead

of starting up a dozen times a day to call to her daughter-in-law, or to her *chère amie* Olive, that the Uhlans were coming down the street full gallop; she even began to take a hopeful view of the political crisis, and to suggest that as Bismarck had not got in yet, he never would get in at all.

And meanwhile the tide of war rolled on, and things grew worse and worse. The day that M. Florian was able to return home was one of the most trying they had endured; the snow lay in the streets, fuel was scarcer than ever, the meat was hardly worth cooking, and yet so difficult to obtain. Fortunately, Madame Florian had still a stock of tea and rice, and Hastings, by his ceaseless exertions, procured her some wood and charcoal, and then went off to see if he could anywhere obtain a drop of milk for the little ones, who were drooping for want of it. He failed in this, but got some sugar, almost a necessary of life to the poor old lady, who had fretted for the last two days because none could be procured. On his way back, he found himself in the midst of a knot of angry men and women, gesticulating vehemently, and shouting denunciations on

Prussians in general, and (as it seemed to the Englishman) some special individual besides. Pushing his way on, he discovered that the particular object of this outbreak was an elderly man, who had taken refuge in a shop, the owner whereof had been trying in vain for some minutes to win a hearing from the clamorous assemblage, now increasing every moment, as idlers poured in from the neighbouring streets. Cries of "A Prussian! A Prussian!" drowned all arguments, and stones were being collected with alarming zeal; several *gamins* being ready, of course, to open the ball, for the mere pleasure of mischief—quite indifferent as to the result.

The elderly man becoming aware that his presence was endangering his protector, or at any rate his windows, suddenly passed to the front, and with a good-humoured, deprecating bow to the people, stepped out into their midst. At first, the boldness of the act was its safety; but a screech or two from the women soon roused the passions of the hungry, irritable crowd, already in that feverish mood when the wild beast impulse seems to be to tear and to destroy, and with a yell of "Down

with the spy—down with the Prussian!” a rush was made at the solitary figure, his hat was knocked off, his umbrella smashed, his coat torn, before Hastings Delmar could reach him. Reach him, however, he did, and, by a desperate charge, cleared a space around him, got him up into a doorway, and stood between him and his foes.

The latter were so surprised that they stopped to look at him, and fortunately there were some there to whom he was known by his good offices. These held back the rest, and thus gave Hastings a moment to ask the stranger what it was all about—what was his offence?

The questions were asked in French, and answered in the same, with a slightly provincial accent. M. Bergmann could only suppose his offence lay in his German name—he was a native of Strasburg.

“Strasburg!” The word was quite enough. Profiting by the momentary lull, Hastings thundered it out to the people, with such skilful dramatic effect, that the tide of feeling turned at once—the spy of the besiegers had become the representative of Alsace, struggling against overwhelming numbers; and it was who could

push nearest, to touch his clothes or shake his hand. His hat, which some dexterous patriot had appropriated, was promptly recovered and brought back (the patriot being ignominiously kicked into the next street); a lane was made through the crowd, and leaning on the Englishman's arm, the hero of the hour walked in triumph to the door of his own counting-house, heartily glad when he was safely inside. He would fain have made Delmar his guest; but this the latter declined, being anxious to return to his friends.

To them his adventure was a subject of lively interest; and the children insisted on the fullest particulars, and acted the whole scene by themselves afterwards—a resource which stood them in good stead, for the incident itself seemed likely to cost them dear. Whether he overstrained himself, or received a blow in the scuffle, Hastings could not tell, but that night, and for some days and nights afterwards, he suffered so acutely from pain in the side, as to be almost prostrated; some of the effects of all he had gone through, and the want of all he had gone without, becoming more and more apparent.

"He has trifled with his constitution," was the remark of Florian's doctor, when at last he was brought to pay him a hasty visit; "but he is young, and nature may give him another chance." And what this meant was made clear to Florian himself by the wanderer's confession as to the fatal habit, which had grown upon him in his self-despair, and which, though often struggled against before, only the fiery ordeal of the siege had enabled him to overcome.

"I could not tell your sweet wife and sister that I had so disgraced myself. How could I have shaken hands with them afterwards? But, Florian, you can tell them now, that since they have put hope into my heart, I have been stronger; and if I ever hold up my head again, it will be, under God's mercy, owing to them. I have tried to do better;—I would if I could;—but I was always as unstable as water, and I must not promise even now."

He was too ill, after this, for talking or consoling; but during his illness M. Bergmann came to the house to visit Henri, whom he had formerly employed; and Henri, whose grateful heart was full of his sick friend,

instead of his own wants and ailments, poured forth a history of all that the English gentleman had done for him and for others, until it transpired that here was the unknown champion whom the good man had sought in vain. M. Bergmann was a wealthy pianoforte maker, only his wealth was not of much use to him at present. He belonged to a Strasburg firm, and had an office in Paris, which he had not chosen to quit. Like his neighbours, he suffered from scarcity, but having gold to spend, could sometimes procure what was inaccessible to others; and he was eager to assist his suffering deliverer. He consulted Florian, who told him what he knew of him, personally and from his wife; and the kind-hearted men agreed together that he must not be allowed to drift away again into obscurity and bad habits: he must be encouraged to regain the station belonging to his birth, and, if the past could be redeemed, to set about the redemption at once. Whatever might have been his faults or his follies, he evidently possessed qualities deserving esteem; and in the opinion of some, perhaps, worthy of something more.

It had not, in fact, escaped M. Florian's notice, nor that of his gentle wife, that Olive's interest in their English friend seemed to deepen with every billet of wood he cut up, every pail of water he carried for her ; nor that the prospect of deliverance from the siege was visibly dimmed by the dread of immediate and final separation. It was only natural that when everything else was gloomy and depressing, even to the bravest, the light in those blue eyes should possess a lustre not entirely their own ; but now that they were heavy and dim with oppression and suffering, she found they had never been prized enough. She envied Françoise, who sat up with him, night after night ; and only comforted herself by petting her in the daytime, forcing her to share their meals, and to get a little sleep while they watched the patient. M. Bergmann did what he could ; he procured them some amount of comfort, and deposited in Florian's hands a sum of money for the use of the Englishman when the siege should be over.

“He may consider it a loan if he pleases, and when he has made his fortune he can pay

it back ; but he must have enough to take him to England, and the sooner he goes the better."

Florian repeated this to his wife, and his wife to Olive. That young lady at once protested against the idea as exceedingly unfeeling ; just as if they were all tired of the trouble he gave them, and were glad to get rid of him with a little money ! She did not think he would be fit to travel for ever so long, and certainly not alone.

"But we cannot go with him, Olive."

"No," said Olive, with a sigh. And in her heart she wished they could.

END OF VOL. II.

